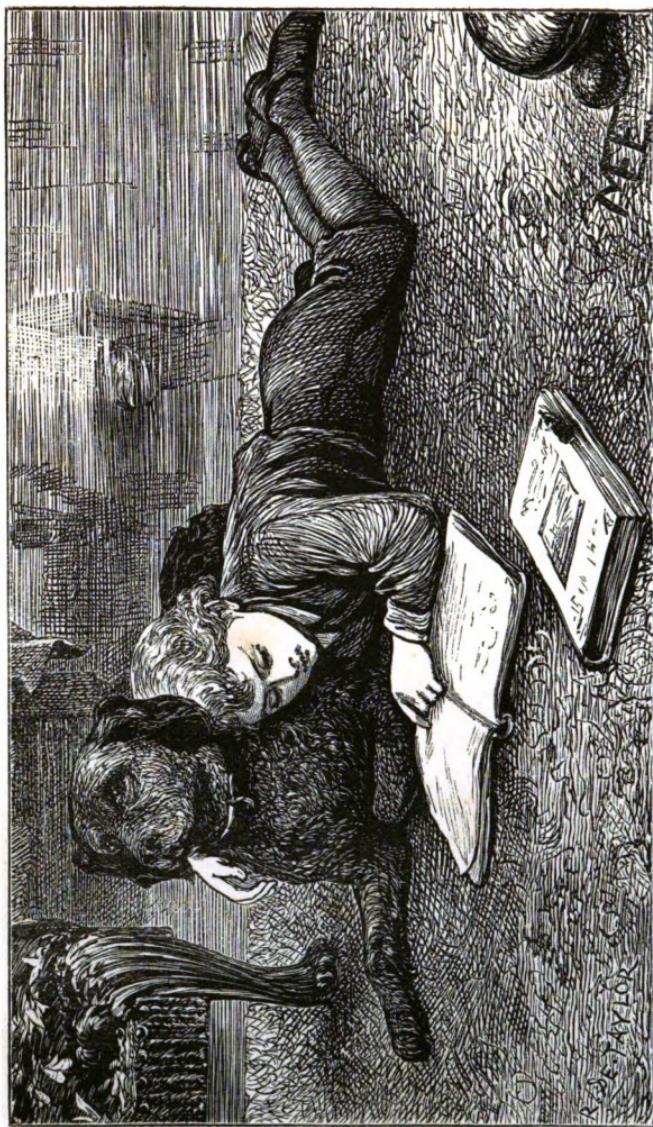


IN MISCHIEF AGAIN

"LYING FULL LENGTH ON THE HEARTH-RUG, WITH HIS ARM ROUND HIS DUMB FRIEND" (p. 208).



THE WATERFALL, OR, A NATURAL PHENOMENON, WITH AN EXPLANATION OF THE CAUSES WHICH PRODUCE IT.

BY J. A. COOPER,

PRINTED IN NEW YORK, U.S.A.



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A NATURAL PHENOMENON,

WITH AN EXPLANATION OF THE CAUSES WHICH PRODUCE IT.

BY J. A. COOPER,

NEW YORK:

IN MISCHIEF AGAIN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"HUGH'S HEROISM," "NELLY'S CHAMPION," ETC.



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IN MISCHIEF AGAIN.

CHAPTER I.

A BRAVE LITTLE FELLOW.

Courcy Singleton Tumbles Down Stairs—How to Bear Wounds and Bruises—Fred Gow—Courcy in Trouble again—Scorns to tell a Lie—The Confession—Courcy thinks he had better be Punished.



ARUSH and tramp, as of half-a-dozen ponies coming down the stairs—a thump and thud, as of some falling body alighting heavily upon the ground, and then total silence.

Such were the sounds which came to the ears of Colonel and Mrs. Singleton, as they sat in the drawing-room of Brerethorpe Manor one hot afternoon towards the end of May.

The colonel, in his comfortable easy chair, had been almost nodding over his paper; whilst Mrs. Singleton, seated opposite him beside the open French window, had been knitting, her face meantime

wearing a look of deep thought, which had slightly puckered her usually placid brow.

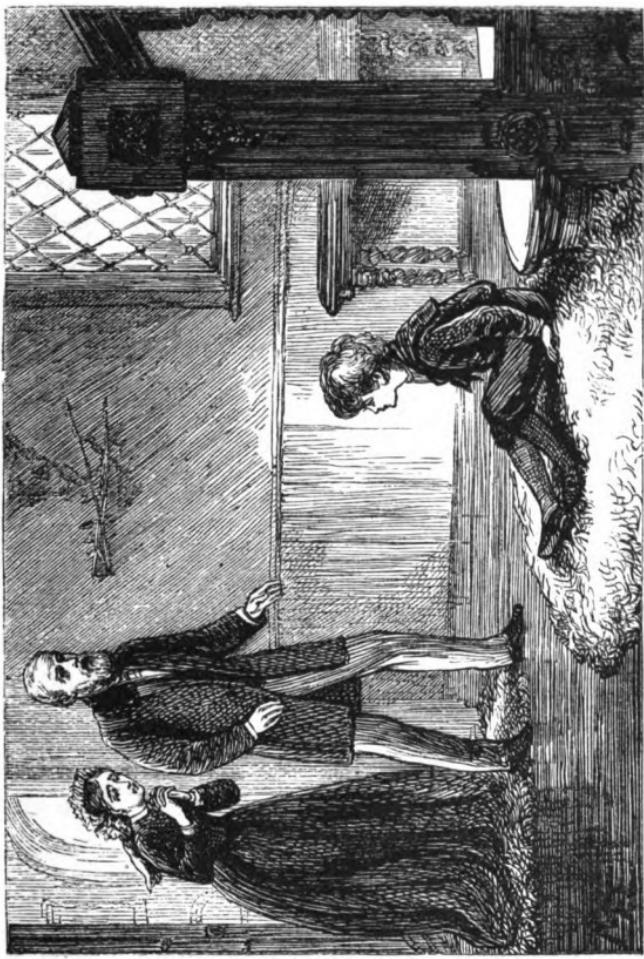
The unbroken quiet which had reigned for the last ten minutes made these abrupt sounds the more noticeable, and, with a violent start, Mrs. Singleton rose, exclaiming—

“That must be Courcy, fallen, I do believe, from the top to the bottom of the stairs! Oh dear! that boy will certainly kill himself some day.” She had been hastening towards the door, but she paused before turning the handle. “He’s so quiet, colonel, I’m half afraid what I may find.”

“I suppose you think he’d be sure to be roaring lustily if he wasn’t either killed or stunned?” said her husband, coming forward. “But you needn’t alarm yourself, my dear; boys are made of pretty tough material. However, let us see what the youngster has been about.” And he passed into the hall, followed by Mrs. Singleton, who peeped nervously round his shoulder.

Instead of the stiff insensible form or little bruised heap which she had evidently feared to find, she perceived her young grandson—a bright-looking boy of about seven or eight years of age—sitting calmly on a mat at the foot of the stairs, contemplating critically a broken knee and grazed knuckles. He looked up as the door opened, and sprang to his feet as if nothing had occurred.

“Granny, mayn’t I go out now?” he began,



"SITTING CALMLY ON A MAT AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS' (p. 10).

eagerly. "I was coming to ask you, because nurse says I'd better wait till it gets cooler; but that's all bosh! What do *I* care for heat!"

Now that her suspense was relieved, Mrs. Singleton became aware how much her nerves had been shaken. Apparently not hearing his petition, she exclaimed—

"Courcy, darling, how you frightened me! I thought you had fallen from the top of the staircase and half killed yourself."

"So I did—at least, I fell down all this flight. I was coming down three steps at a time, because, you see, I was in such a hurry, and my foot slipped. But that's nothing; mayn't I go out, granny?"

"Let me look at your knee, dear; it's dreadfully bruised, and the skin knocked off. You'd better go to nurse and get her to put something on it."

"Granny! make a fuss over a little hurt like that!" he exclaimed, with a mixture of scorn and remonstrance in his tones. "I should never do to be a soldier if I cried over every little bruise—should I, grandpapa?"

"Scarcely," replied his grandfather, patting his curly head with a proud look. He was a tall fine man himself, erect and active yet, with a long beard, a refined and aristocratic face, and a bearing that plainly showed he had been accustomed to command. "But, Courcy, my fine fellow," he went on, "we mustn't have this sort of thing happening again, for you have startled grandmamma nearly out of her senses.

So another time don't come floundering down with as much noise as an avalanche or a dozen troopers would make, for it disturbs grandmamma and me; and you must learn to think of others, my boy."

"Ah! that is what papa says," responded the child, with a look of reflection on his face. "He says a brave soldier is always gentle to the women and old helpless people."

Mrs. Singleton did not say what she thought, though a smile crossed her features at being thus classed with the "old helpless people." She, who was still the brightest and most active of little women, and felt almost as young as she had done at thirty. Her fair hair even now only showed a streak of gray here and there, whilst her complexion was still fresh and smooth. Hers was a face that had wonderfully preserved its beauty; whilst time had but deepened its sweet expression, and moulded it into one of the comeliest, pleasantest countenances an old lady could possibly have, though we ought rather to say *elderly* lady, for *old* in appearance it seemed probable Mrs. Singleton would never be.

She had resumed her low seat beside the drawing-room window by this time, whilst the colonel had flung himself into his easy chair.

Courcy stood between them—a handsome, manly little fellow, with splendid dark eyes full of intelligence, and often twinkling with fun, a broad, open forehead, curly chestnut hair, a slight graceful figure, and a mouth

which, though almost faultless in its curves, showed plenty of determination of character, which not unfrequently displayed itself in the form of self-will.

"Granny, won't you say 'Yes'?" he asked, with a shade of impatience.

"Why are you so bent upon going out, dear? The sun is so scorching just now."

"But a breeze has sprung up, granny dear; and I do so want to fly my new kite. Fred Gow said he would come up and help me, as this is a half-holiday at the school."

"Fred Gow!" repeated Mrs. Singleton, doubtfully. "I don't know that he is the best companion you could have, dear. He's a little rough in his ways, isn't he?"

"He's a bit of a prig, perhaps," said Master Courcy, "but he's a capital hand at flying a kite; and he's better than *nobody*, you know."

This last observation was a telling one, and overcame granny's scruples; for she had a great dread of the boy being moped and unhappy, living with "two dull old people like ourselves," as she sometimes remarked to her husband. So she gave the desired permission—only stipulating that they should play in the shade.

"All right, granny," and the child was off like a shot through the open window, racing and shouting in the exuberance of his spirits, totally regardless of the heat which every one was feeling more or less.

By degrees the sounds grew more faint and distant,

and again Colonel and Mrs. Singleton were left in quiet.

It was a new thing to them to have their tranquillity thus rudely disturbed by sudden alarms and outbursts, startling their nerves, and keeping them in a state of perpetual suspense and dread as to what might happen next. For it was only within the last few months that their two little grandchildren had come to take up their abode with them, on the departure of their papa, Captain Singleton, for India.

They had lost their mother, poor little things ! a couple of years before, so that their natural home was with their grandparents, who gladly welcomed them to Brerethorpe. For they were both fond of children, and liked to hear their merry voices and ringing laughter about the house. Still it was a pleasure that had grave responsibilities attached to it ; as they soon found when they became better acquainted with Master Courcy's daring spirit.

"But he is a fine fellow," the colonel would say ; and "a dear lovable boy," as his grandmamma owned, even when suffering most from the attacks of nervousness into which his exploits were continually throwing her.

His little sister Dora, younger than Courcy by a year and a half, gave no trouble, and was the pet of every one ; being so gentle and loving that none could withstand her winning ways, whilst her rare beauty, joined to a certain grace and childish dignity,

made her seem like a little queen among other children. Courcy was a hero in her eyes, and this "hero worship" often led her, as it does older people, into trouble, for she was always ready to follow his bidding, even when he was plotting mischief. But it must be owned that whenever he had thoughtlessly brought her into disgrace he was always ready to take the whole share of the blamé upon his own shoulders; and had over and over again chivalrously insisted upon bearing the punishment that would have been hers, in addition to his own. But punishment had little effect upon him. He always seemed to have forgotten it the next moment, and in his thoughtlessness was ready to plunge himself into a fresh scrape, until nurse declared she was at her wits' end to know how to keep Master Courcy out of mischief.

"For he's that venturesome," she would say, in some of her confidences to cook, "that there isn't a thing he won't do if he has set his mind on it; and I declare he's up to some fresh prank almost every hour. It's a wonder he hasn't broken his neck before now."

Still, if anyone but herself had ventured to make such reflections, she would have fired up and turned upon them in indignant defence of her boy, saying, they did not know how to make allowances for a fine high-spirited young gentleman like Master Courcy, who would one day make as brave a soldier—they might take her word for it—as the Duke of Wellington himself.

It was all very well for nurse to boast thus; but

when her young hero came in with knickerbockers all rent and torn, from his efforts to emulate the squirrels in climbing to the highest branches of the trees, or a whole new suit of clothes bespattered with mire from some tumble into a ditch or pool of stagnant water, he himself having narrowly escaped either drowning or a few broken bones, she devoutly, if secretly, wished he could be induced to conduct himself a little better and more reasonably. However, her wishes did not seem likely to be fulfilled.

An hour or so passed by without any fresh disturbance, and Colonel and Mrs. Singleton were sitting quietly reading, when sounds of boys' voices broke in upon them.

"I must go and tell them about it, and I'd better do it at once," Courey was remarking, in a rather dolorous tone. "Should you think they would be *very* angry, Fred?"

"I shouldn't like to be in *your* shoes, I know!" was the reply, which was not encouraging.

"But you are as much to blame as I am."

"Am I, though!" rejoined the other roughly. "I'd like to know how you make that out?"

"You helped me move the ladder, and you were the first to say how jolly it would be to get some of those cherries."

"How dare you say so!" growled Fred, in furious tones. Then, modulating his voice, he went on, "Why don't you tell them the wind blew the ladder down? they'd never be any the wiser."

"What!" cried Courcy, "*tell a lie!* You cowardly beggar, what do you mean by thinking I would do such a thing?" His face was all aflame, and his accents full of strong indignation.

"Oh, come," returned the other, coolly, "you needn't put yourself out like this, you know; it isn't worth while. If you are silly enough to prefer being punished, I've nothing to say against it. Only I wouldn't be so peppery as you are for something."

"Do you think I am so afraid of a paltry punishment that I would tell a lie to save myself from it?" retorted Courcy, hotly. "I should be ashamed to do that; and wouldn't papa just be ashamed of me too! Yes," he went on, maintaining his ground bravely, in spite of Fred's taunting laugh, "I know he would say it would be better to be flogged till I was black and blue than disgrace myself by a lie."

"Hear, hear!" cried his companion, mockingly. "Aren't we high and mighty, that's all! Well, my young gentleman, I must be off now; and I wish you joy of the mess you've got yourself into," he continued, maliciously. "Only I hope, as you are so mighty particular about sticking to the truth, you'll let them know *I* hadn't anything to do with the smash. Don't you go putting it off on my shoulders."

"Do you think I'm likely to, you coward! I'm much more likely to be tempted to deny I've ever had anything to do with such a miserable sneaking fellow," retorted Courcy, passionately; and pushing his way

through the thick growth of shrubs which skirted the lawn, he presented himself in front of the drawing-room window. His face was flushed, and his dark eyes were burning with a proud indignant light.

"Grandpapa," he began at once, unflinchingly, and not attempting to soften or palliate the bare facts of the case, "I've sent a ladder falling right against the conservatory, and it has smashed ever so much glass, and a whole lot of the best flowers are broken. I didn't *mean* to do it, of course; but it's done, and I'm very sorry."

"Dear, dear, how *did* you manage that?" said the colonel, trying to put on a grave stern look, though his eyes were beaming with pride at his little grandson's spirited conduct, for he and his wife had involuntarily overheard the whole of the two boys' conversation. "How did it happen?"

"I was trying to move the ladder, and set it against another part of the wall, and it slipped and fell."

"But what did you want with it? and where did you get it from?"

"We found it there. Luke had left it, I suppose, for he had been doing something to the cherry-tree."

"And you were trying to get at some of the cherries, eh, my boy?"

"Yes, grandpapa," confessed Courcy, with a tinge of shame flushing his ingenuous face.

"And don't you think that was rather greedy of you, sir, when as much fruit is given you every day as is thought good for you?"

The crimson deepened on the boy's cheeks, whilst he hung his little head with an air that seemed to say he stood convicted.

Mrs. Singleton came to the rescue. "Don't be hard upon him, grandpapa," she said, as she drew the little fellow to her side, and let her eyes rest on him with a loving gaze. "Don't be hard on him, for he has spoken out the truth bravely, like a man, and granny is proud of him. And as to the cherries," she added, mischievously, "I've no doubt when you were a boy you thought the fruit which hung out of reach, or could only be got at by climbing a wall or scaling a ladder, far better than any that was put on the table at dessert. And just think what temptation it must have been to find the ladder standing there all ready."

"My dear, you will utterly spoil the boy, if you try to find excuses for him like this," returned the colonel, making an effort to preserve some appearance of sternness. "He ought not to have gone after cherries without permission, for they did not belong to him. And Courcy, my boy, you can't learn too early to respect other people's property," he added, drawing the child between his knees, and laying his hands on his shoulders, "You know you had no business to touch one of those cherries, for they were not yours; and no one has ever given you permission to help yourself to fruit in the garden, because you are too young to know what is good for you. Only, as you have made such a frank and free confession of the whole affair, I will let you off this

time ; but there must be no more smashing of the conservatory and granny's choice plants, remember."

Coureys did not speak for a moment. He was evidently pondering something, for there was a look of thought on his boyish face.

"I think you had better punish me, grandpapa, because I deserve it, and it might make me remember. And you know I always forget things so. They slip right out of my head, and so I go and do just what I've been told not to do. But I'm awfully sorry about the conservatory, though ; for it looks such a mess now ! "

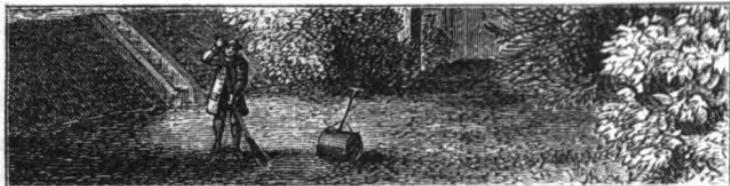
"Well, I don't know that I oughtn't to carry out your suggestion, and make you do penance in some way or other," said Colonel Singleton, with a smile he could not repress. "Because I can't have this sort of thing happening again, you know ; and your memory is apt to be treacherous. Still, as I have said I would let you off this time, I can't go back from my word."

"Grandpapa, it shan't happen again," said the boy in decided tones, as he glanced up confidently and lovingly into the kind face looking down upon him. "I'll manage to remember somehow."



"' NURSE, CAN YOU TELL ME ANY WAY OF MAKING MYSELF REMEMBER THINGS ? '" (p. 25).

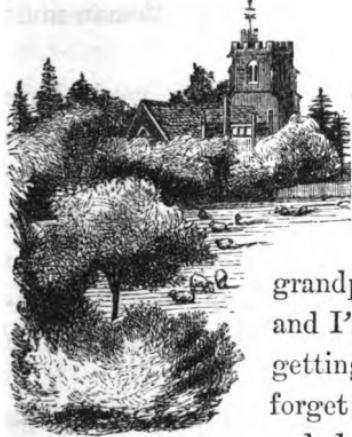




CHAPTER II.

HELPING A BAD MEMORY.

Courcy Wants to Remember—Nurse Advises a Knot—Unforeseen Results — Forgetfulness again, and more Knots — Luke tells how he Tied a Knot.



NURSE, can you tell me any way of making myself remember things?" asked Courcy, as he was being put to bed that night.

"Because I've promised grandpapa to remember something, and I'm so dreadfully afraid of forgetting it. You know I always do forget what you tell me, and go and do just the things you've said I'm not to do," he added, naïvely, by way of explaining his difficulty.

"I know that well enough," returned nurse, severely. "Many's the time I've had to punish you for it, and yet you don't seem to grow a bit better, till my patience is most worn out. Yes, Master Courcy, I don't think you'd find many as would bear with you as I've done."

"I wonder what made you do it," remarked Courcy in a grave tone, as if wishing to investigate the matter further; "I'm sure I wouldn't if I'd been *you*," he continued, sitting down on the floor to pull off his shoes and socks. "But, nurse, you haven't told me how I am to remember things, and I really do want not to forget this time."

"What is it you want to remember?"

"Not to smash the conservatory again; I mean, not to put the ladder near it, and not to take the cherries. Because I've promised grandpapa, and a gentleman must keep his promises, musn't he?"

"Well, I must say I shouldn't think you'd have much difficulty in remembering that after what has happened. Only I think you deserved a downright punishment for it, and anybody but your grandpapa would have given it to you," said nurse, who seemed to consider it a duty laid upon her to keep up an appearance of severity in her intercourse with the irrepressible Courcy.

"But he didn't, you see; and it's just *because* he didn't that I want to make sure of never doing the same piece of naughtiness again. So what can I do, nurse, to remember?"

"Well I've known people who had bad memories tie a knot in their pocket-handkerchief, to make themselves think."

"But how would that do it?" asked Courcy, not yet understanding quite clearly.

"Why, don't you see, when they take it out and find a knot in it, they say to themselves, 'What's that for?' and then it all comes back to their minds."

"Thank you, nurse; I'll try that plan," and reaching his handkerchief, the boy tied a huge knot in each of the four corners.

Mrs. Cardle little imagined what would be the result of her plan for assisting a defective memory; but the next day it seemed as if everything had been bewitched, and afflicted with a mania for tying itself into knots. For there were knots everywhere. Knots in Courcy's night-shirt, knots in all the corners of his sheets, knots in every one of the nursery towels, in her own apron, in Dora's pinafore, in the quilts on the beds, even the sleeves of her gown hanging against the door were tied up in knots.

Downstairs, Mrs. Singleton at lunch discovered knots in the table-cloth, and in Courcy's table-napkin, in Dora's sash, and even in her own ribbons, whilst the colonel's pocket-handkerchief, which was hanging a little out of his pocket behind, had also grown a knot in the corner. But things reached a climax when a new and delicate antimacassar, a present Mrs. Singleton had lately received, was discovered wreathed into a couple of large knots tightly pulled, so that when they were undone it was one hopeless mass of creases.

"Is this your senseless trick, Courcy?" asked the colonel, on hearing Mrs. Singleton's exclamations of consternation. "What in the world is the meaning

of it, sir? Can't you possibly keep your hands out of mischief for a moment?"

"I didn't mean it for mischief, grandpapa," replied the boy, in injured tones, "it's remembering."

"Remembering!" echoed the colonel.

"Yes; I want so much to remember what I promised you yesterday, and nurse said this was a way people found help them, so I said I would try it."

"I'm pretty sure she never suggested that you should go tying knots all over the place, spoiling everything you can lay your hands upon."

"No; she said in one's pocket-handkerchief; but I thought I would make surer, because, you see, I don't often use my handkerchief, except when I cut my fingers, or want to bring home moss or stones, and so I thought that might not be enough. If I had a beard, now, like you, grandpapa, it would be capital, for I might tie *that* into a knot, and I should always have it by me, because one can't lose one's beard, though one can one's handkerchief. I wonder, though, if I could tie a knot in my hair," and the boy seized one of his curly locks.

"Nonsense, Courcy; don't be foolish, my man, and remember, there must be no more of this tying of knots in everything. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, grandpapa."

A few minutes afterwards Courcy sauntered out of the room, apparently bound for the nursery, but not having any particular amusement in hand, he lingered

in the hall, and wandered round, investigating everything, until his eye fell upon his grandpapa's riding-whip, which was lying on the table. Quite forgetting the admonition he had just received, he seized it in his busy fingers, and almost before he knew what he was doing, had tied it into a succession of knots. He was just finishing it off when he heard the colonel's horse being brought round to the door, and the next moment the colonel himself came out, followed by Mrs. Singleton.

After taking up his hat he looked about for his whip, and on perceiving its state, turned round at once upon his grandson.

"Courcy, is this your doing?" he asked, sternly.

A low murmur of assent came from the little culprit.

"Did I not tell you I would have no more of this? Answer me, my boy. Did I not say you were not to tie any more knots?"

"Yes, grandpapa; but I forgot."

"Is it possible? in this minute?"

"I *did* forget, grandpapa," cried the boy, hotly, with a flash of indignation at the implied doubt—as he thought—in his word. "I quite forgot. I always *do* forget," he added, almost in despondent tones.

"Well, you must learn to remember, somehow," said the colonel, decidedly. "When grandpapa says a thing is not to be done, he means it, and must have obedience. Don't you know, my boy, that is

one of the first things a soldier has to learn—implicit, unquestioning obedience.”

“I didn’t mean to be disobedient, indeed I didn’t, grandpapa; but I forgot. Oh, dear! how shall I remember? I’ve been tying knots in everything all the morning long till I’ve got into the habit of it, and that was to make myself remember, and now I’m to *remember not* to do it,” said Courcy, in doleful tones, his face wearing a laughable expression of perplexity.

“Well, darling, keep on saying to yourself, ‘You are not to tie knots,’ and that may help you,” said Mrs. Singleton. “I’m sure you don’t mean to be naughty, dear boy, but everything grandpapa tells you *must* be remembered. And you know we all have to complain of your thoughtlessness; so do begin, dear, and try to cure yourself of it.”

“You mustn’t tie knots—you mustn’t tie knots,” repeated Courcy, as he followed the colonel out to the door, for he always liked to see him mount his horse and start for his ride. And even as he kissed his hand to him, just before Prince turned the corner of the drive, when, according to custom, the colonel looked to give a parting nod, he reiterated, “You mustn’t tie knots, you know—you mustn’t tie knots.”

After this Courcy rushed out of doors to join Luke, one of the under-gardeners, who was leisurely sweeping up some fallen leaves, and collecting them in a barrow.

He volunteered his assistance, which was accepted

by Luke, though he knew full well that "the young master" was far more likely to make a litter than to help clear it away.

Gathering a heap of leaves in his arms, he staggered with them towards Luke's barrow, murmuring aloud to himself as he went, "You are not to tie knots, you know."

The man, seeing no one else near, concluded that it was to himself the words were addressed.

"Not to tie knots, beant I? Ay, but it's a bit too late to tell me that now, for I've a been and done it."

"Done what? Do you mean you've been tying a knot?" inquired Courcy.

"Ay, that's about it," replied Luke, with a confirmatory nod of his head.

"Have you!" cried Courcy, with a sort of chuckle. "Have you really! And where did you do it?" he asked, with an eagerness that the other scarcely seemed to understand.

"'Twas in a *church* I tied my knot."

"In a church!" echoed Courcy, in astonishment. "Oh, I never! What *did* you tie up in a church?"

"Well, I tied *myself* up; that's about what I did."

"Tied *yourself* up!" screamed Courcy, in an ecstasy of wonderment. "Oh, Luke, what a funny man you are! And what did you tie yourself to? Was it one of the pillars?"

"No 'twarn't. 'Twas a *woman* as I tied myself to," replied Luke, with stolid gravity.

The little boy's eyes opened wide with surprise.

“What an odd thing to do! But I can’t think how she came to let you,” he remarked, without reflecting how little complimentary his speech might sound in Luke’s ears. “And did any one come and untie you?” he asked, with interest.

“No, no; we beant untied yet, and aint like to be, neither.”

Courcy’s face presented a ludicrous picture of perplexity. He was fairly puzzled.

“Do you know, Luke, I am afraid you must be telling stories,” he said, with a look and manner of the most profound gravity. “If you were tied to a woman she’d be here beside you, and I should see her; but there’s nobody but you and me on the lawn.”

Instead of answering, Luke went off into convulsions of laughter, which rendered him quite incapable of speaking, whilst his face underwent such contortions that it was little wonder Courcy’s fears were aroused, thinking his friend must be suddenly taken ill, or seized with some violent pain.

“Whatever is the matter, Luke?” he inquired anxiously; “shall I run for the doctor?”

“Oh, oh!” gasped the other, holding his sides, “you’ll kill me, Master Courcy!” and again he went off into a series of chuckles, which followed each other too rapidly to allow of any further speech.

“Oh, oh! ha, ha! he, he!” were the only intelligible sounds to be distinguished amidst the general roar, for Luke’s laughter, rarely provoked, but irrepress-



"DO YOU MEAN YOU'VE BEEN TYING A KNOT?" INQUIRED COURCY" (p. 31).

C

sible when once excited, was no low musical ripple, but a sort of loud harsh cackle.

"What in the world are you laughing at?" demanded Courcy, a little testily, as he discovered that it was merriment, not agony of body, that caused the spasms which passed over Luke's face. "Why don't you tell me what it is you are laughing at?" he reiterated.

"It's *you!*" roared the other, again relapsing into a prolonged chuckle, which left him panting for breath, and apparently much exhausted.

"Me!" exclaimed Courcy, in a slightly offended tone of voice.

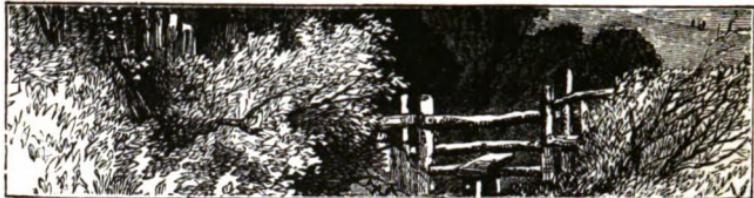
"Ay, you. You was too much for me, taking of it all so literal. Why, haven't you ever heard people speak of tying of 'emselves up in marriage?"

"Do you mean to say you've been and got married?" cried the boy, incredulously.

Luke nodded. "Ay, that's about it," he said briefly.

"Oh, why *didn't* you tell me before? I might have been at your wedding then. Why *didn't* you tell me?" he added, in injured tones.

"Well, we kept it pretty snug, Bess and me. We didn't want no talk nor fuss, you see, for we be plain folk, and it might have made me kind'o' awkward like, to have had a crowd of people gaping round. I should have looked so foolish supposing I'd been and put the ring on the wrong finger, or said I *won't* when I ought to say *I will*, and there's no telling what a man mayn't do when he's flustered; so we kept it snug."



CHAPTER III.

THE PERFORMING MONKEY.

A Visit to Horton—A Wonderful Monkey—Courcy plays Monkey to Dora as Man—Bad Consequences to Nurse's Band-box—Courcy puts on the Old Lady's Bonnet, and thinks it ought to have a better Box—Gathering Roses—Courcy Lost—Dora's Valuation of him—Growing Anxiety as Courcy does not Turn Up—Colonel Singleton goes in Search.



WOULD you young people like to come with me into Horton this afternoon?" asked Mrs. Singleton, at luncheon, a few days after this.

The two children gave a delighted assent to the proposal, and as soon as the meal was over rushed upstairs to nurse to be dressed for the drive, carrying with them an invitation to the latter to make one of the party.

On reaching the town, their first visit was to a toy-shop, from which they were just sallying forth when they perceived a little crowd on the opposite side of the street. Courcy's quick eyes soon made out that the centre of attraction was a performing monkey; and the next moment he had darted across the road and edged his way into the midst of the little knot of lookers-on. Dora, less fortunate, inasmuch as nurse held her by the hand and detained her, could only gaze from a distance; until at length nurse yielded to her entreaties, and condescended to cross over, Mrs. Singleton saying that they could meet her at the next shop to which she was going, which was only a few doors farther on.

It was the most wonderful monkey they had ever seen, and Courcy's face was one broad grin of delight; whilst Dora's blue eyes sparkled with excitement and amusement, as the little creature, dressed in a scarlet petticoat surmounted by a blue jacket braided in gold, with a black hat on its head, danced and showed off its various accomplishments.

The platform on which it performed was a sort of three-legged stand or table, which the man had set up on the pavement; and as it executed one clever antic after another, a low murmur of applause ran through the little crowd, which was composed chiefly of lads of all sorts and sizes, from the unscrupulous errand-boy, with his basket hastily set down on the ground as he pressed forward, eager for any amusement by the way, and

indifferent to the fact that he was wasting his employer's time in an unconsciousious manner, to the school-boy with his strap full of books, always ready to enjoy with the keenest zest any passing novelty.

After gracefully taking off his hat, and bowing to the assembled company, the small performer gravely proceeded to play upon a drum handed to him by his master, keeping time with great precision, and altogether showing no mean talents in that line. But if any one supposed that playing on a drum was his sole accomplishment, they vastly underrated his powers, as he soon showed, when, a tambourine having been handed to him, he went through a skilful performance upon it, accompanied by various graceful movements of the body, according to the most approved style of tambourine playing.

The violin came next, with which instrument he showed himself to be equally at home; and that was followed by the banjo, in playing on which he imitated to perfection the nigger style and action.

But the delight and admiration of his youthful audience reached its climax when, a small gun being put into his hands, he proceeded to load it, ramming it down with great care, and then firing it off. Shouts of approbation greeted this last performance, in recognition of which the monkey, on a hint from his master, took off his hat and made a dignified bow all round.

Courcy was all excitement, and the rest of the after-

noon could talk of little else, whilst, when they got home, he and Dora acted it over again, Dora being the man and he the monkey, and nurse's band-box in which she kept her best bonnet being coolly seized upon and made to serve as drum for want of something better, the little boy's fists doing duty as drumsticks. But Courcy, growing more and more vehement in his performance, and wishing to finish up with a grand finale, at length drummed right through the lid, which was smashed in on the top of the bonnet.

"Oh, Courcy ! whatever *will* nurse say ?" exclaimed Dora in dismay, for it was during a temporary absence from the room of the owner of the damaged property that this had occurred. "It's her best bonnet she keeps in there, and it's such a grand one, with yellow roses and black lace, and great big berries. Cook called it a 'love of a bonnet' when she came up to have a look at it the evening it came home, and nurse said it had cost 'a pretty penny.' But I'm sure I don't see how she could have got all that for a penny ! It was very cheap if she did. And yet she seemed to think it was dear. But *won't* she be angry when she sees what you've done !"

"It's her own fault; she ought to keep it in a stronger box, not in a thing like this, that breaks directly you touch it," said Courcy, in aggrieved tones. "But let us have a look at it. Oh, I say ! isn't it a swell ! I wonder how *I* should look in a bonnet !"

The thought had no sooner entered into his head than he pulled out the "love of a bonnet" from its receptacle, and placed it upon his own curly head, standing in front of the looking-glass to view the effect. It was a laughable one, and both children were in fits of merriment at the ludicrous appearance of the little figure, when nurse, quietly entering the room, caught them thus in the act of making free with her belongings.

Aghast at what she saw, she was for the moment speechless with indignation, holding up her hands with a gesture expressive of her outraged feelings on beholding the disrespect with which her best bonnet was being treated.

"Well, Master Courcy, you *are* growing *that* audacious it's getting past bearing!" she exclaimed, as soon as she found breath. "Who would ever believe that I couldn't turn my back for five minutes but you'd be hunting out my band-box, which you've no business to touch, and ferreting out my Sunday-going bonnet? If that isn't a liberty as no one who calls himself a young gentleman would ever be guilty of, I should like to know what is!"

The delinquent stood before her with the bonnet still on his head—for he had forgotten to remove it—looking such a droll little object, that in spite of her anger she could scarcely forbear a smile as she glanced at him. This the incorrigible Courcy was not slow to perceive; and as she took the damaged head-

"IN FRONT OF THE LOOKING-GLASS" (p. 40).



gear into her hands to examine it more closely, he remarked—

“ You know, nurse, you *ought* to keep it in a better box; not in such a thing as this, which won’t bear a touch; ” and with a kick he sent the despised article flying to the other end of the room.

“ Have done now, will you, Master Courcy! ” cried the exasperated Mrs. Cradle. “ Haven’t you done mischief enough already, that you want to go and make things worse still! But I daresay you wouldn’t have cared if you had battered it as flat as a pancake for me, ” she continued, pulling out the crushed flowers, and trying to bend the bonnet-shape. “ But, all the same, I’m not going to give in to your mischievous ways, and encourage you in them by not punishing you for them. I shouldn’t be doing my duty by you if I did. So, Master Courcy, you’ll just sit down in that chair, and there you’ll stay without moving for an hour. Now, you hear me; and if you don’t sit quiet, and behave as you ought, I’ll just take you right away down to your grand-papa. See if I don’t! ”

“ I’ll ask granny if she can’t give you a better box, ” said Courcy, forgivingly, as, having apparently made up his mind that it was not worth while to dispute the point, he yielded to nurse’s decree, and perched himself sideways upon the seat indicated. “ A wooden one, you know, ” he explained.

“ And I’ll have a good strong lock and key put to it, you may be sure of that, ” retorted nurse, whose

feelings had not yet recovered their tone ; “ for it isn’t safe to leave anything within *your* reach ; I’ve learnt that much.”

The next afternoon proving cool and lovely, the nursery party sallied forth, as usual on fine days, for a walk. They went up the hill by the road, and then turned off into the fields, in one of which nurse sat down, as she often did, with a bit of needlework to amuse her whilst the children played. She flattered herself they *could* come to no harm there, the field being free from cows or horses, ponds or ditches ; only one smooth slope of turf bounded by high hedges, whilst a rickety, almost impassable, five-barred gate formed a barrier between it and the field beyond.

The children wandered off in search of amusement to the far end, where they first occupied themselves in endeavouring to gather a bunch of wild roses to take home to their grandmamma. Many and desperate were the efforts Courcy made to reach them, for, as usual, they grew provokingly high. Still, by the help of the crook of nurse’s old sunshade, which, after a little hesitation, she had lent them—a generous act on her part, for she knew when once she entrusted anything into Courcy’s hands there was no saying in what state it might be returned—he managed to possess himself of a few, though not without receiving many a scratch and prick on both hands and face. But he cared little for that ; and his ardour increasing as difficulties thickened, he plunged in a most reckless way right into the

midst of thorns and briars, regardless of the risk to which he exposed his clothes, to say nothing of his person.

After a time, however, he espied some better ones in the adjoining field, and telling Dora to wait where she was—as it was such a difficult stile she could never manage it—he clambered over himself and disappeared from sight.

The little girl waited patiently for a time, and then she called to him; but he did not answer. She called again, “Courcy, aren’t you coming? I’m sure you must have got enough roses by this time. Do come back and let us play at something.” But no response was borne back to her; all was silence.

Still she waited, and still she called to him at intervals, though her patience was almost exhausted; and when at length nurse came to summon them to go home to tea, no Courcy had yet reappeared, and she was found alone, leaning disconsolately against the gate.

“We’ve lost Courcy, grandpapa,” cried Dora, meeting Colonel Singleton in the hall as they went in. “He went away, and we can’t find him anywhere, and have had to come home without him.”

“Lost Courcy! Well, to be sure!” exclaimed the colonel, lifting up his hands to express his astonishment. “Only think what quiet, peaceful times we shall have of it now, for he made no end of commotion, didn’t he? smashing dolls, and I don’t know what else!”

"I'd rather he'd break all my dolls than go and get lost," said tender-hearted little Dora, not able to enter into a joke when she was in such sober earnest.

"Would you, my pet? Then we must think of some means of finding him."

"Shall you offer a reward for him, like you did for Juno?" asked the little one, eagerly. "You offered two pounds, you know; and a man soon brought him back."

"Ah! but he was a *dog*, and a valuable one. You don't think any *boy* is worth two pounds, do you?"

"*Courcy* is," returned literal Dora. "I don't know about other boys; but *he's* worth—oh, hundreds and thousands of pounds!"

"He's worth the whole world to you, isn't he, my child?" said grandpapa, lifting her up that he might kiss the pretty little face, now so grave and full of serious earnest.

"Then what will you do to find him?" asked Dora, seeming to think there was no time to be lost. "For if we don't find him before night, whatever *will* he do?"

"I don't expect he has strayed very far, and I daresay he will turn up before bed-time comes, for I don't fancy he would particularly care to spend the night out of doors. I daresay he is hiding from nurse for mischief, the young rogue that he is!"



“COURCY AND DORA GATHERING WILD ROSES” (p. 44).

"Do you think so, sir? I'm sure I can't tell what to think," returned Mrs. Cardle. "I only hope and trust no harm is happening to him. But if he doesn't come by the time we've finished tea, I must go and have another hunt for him; it's too bad of him to serve me like this."

"The young monkey! I wonder what new thing he is up to?" said grandpapa, who apparently saw no cause for alarm in the sudden disappearance of the boy, and so succeeded in somewhat reassuring the other two.

But tea was over and sent away, and still there was no sign of Courcy. Nurse put on her bonnet again and went out upon a search that proved fruitless, returning, in the vague hope that he might have arrived during her absence. But there was no trace of him.

Her anxiety, which was now fully aroused, communicated itself to Dora, who was put to bed sobbing when bed-time came. Mrs. Singleton, too, was soon infected with their fears; though for a good while the colonel pooh-poohed the idea of there being any ground for apprehension, stating his conviction that it was just some fresh piece of mischief of Master Courcy's.

But when evening began to draw in, and there was still no sign of him; when nurse, having once more scoured the hill, came back declaring he was nowhere to be seen; when Luke, who was sent down to the village, returned, saying no one had heard of him; and when, after being dispatched on a mission of inquiry to all the

neighbouring farm-houses and outlying cottages—even the rectory close at hand not being overlooked—all his researches only met with the same result; then the colonel himself at last began to feel seriously uneasy, though he would not own it to nurse or Mrs. Singleton.

But poor nurse was by this time in an almost frantic state of mind, reproaching herself bitterly for not having kept a sharper look-out over the movements of the boy; and expressing aloud to the sympathising listeners in the servants' hall her conviction that "If anything should happen to that darling boy—bless him!—she would never be able to lift up her head again—*never*, as long as she lived!" But cook tried to comfort her by exhorting her not to "take on so"; whilst William, the tall footman, made the consolatory remark that there were a good many tramps about, and he had even heard there were some gipsies in the neighbourhood. Nurse receiving this intelligence with an hysterical shriek, the remainder of the womankind turned upon the offender with indignation, and hustled him out of the room into ignominious banishment.

The unfortunate William, covered thus with disgrace, and scarcely knowing what he had done, only that somehow or other he had committed a fearful blunder of some sort, sneaked off, with crestfallen look, to his chief, the butler, to suggest that if his services were not required just then, he might make another search for Master Courcy.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Singleton in the drawing-room was in an agony of suspense, her fears growing with every passing moment, as she imagined all kind of horrors, possible and impossible, befalling her darling, and thinking what it would be to have to write out to the father in India any ill news of his boy.





CHAPTER IV.

INDEPENDENT CONDUCT.

Courcy meets the Monkey again, and goes after him—Mr. Josiah Meek Invites Courcy to Supper, and calls upon him to Pay the Bill—Courcy Starts for Home.



WE left Courcy having just got over the stile which led into the field in which he had espied some tempting wild roses, which had excited in him a desire to possess himself of them. But he had no sooner clambered over, and got on the other side of the high hedge which had hitherto intercepted his view, than, looking around, he caught sight in the distance of the figure of a man, who proved to be no other than his friend of yesterday—the exhibitor of the performing monkey.

Roses and everything else were forgotten in the eager desire to see the clever little creature act again; and without a moment's reflection, he dashed off in a

headlong chase after him, running, racing, clambering recklessly over stiles, or squeezing himself through between the bars, sometimes plunging through hedges or leaping ditches, in his anxiety to overtake the man, who seemed to be walking at a brisk pace right away from him. But every now and then he got a glimpse of the scarlet dress of the monkey perched on his shoulder; and at length he drew near enough to make his shouts heard.

The man turned, and saw with some surprise the little figure flying after him. He stood still and waited for him to come up.

"Well, what is it, young master?" he asked. "Be anything wrong?"

"I want to see the monkey act again," panted Courey, with scarcely enough breath to speak. "I saw him yesterday at Horton; and he's such a clever little creature, it beats anything I ever came across."

"But he don't do them things by the roadside," returned the other. "He must have an audience first, must Jacko. You'll have to come on to the next village if you want to see him."

Courey looked disappointed, his countenance lengthening considerably.

"But that ain't far, if you like to come along with me," said the man. "It's only a matter of a mile or two, and I should say a strapping young gent like you wouldn't think much of that."

Courey hesitated a moment. His thoughts had

flown back to nurse, and the certainty that she would say "No" should he ask her permission to accompany his new friend; besides to go all the way back to her would take up a great deal of time, and he could not expect the man to wait so long for him; and to walk all that way in company with the monkey was a chance not to be lightly flung away.

Moreover, the other had called him "a strapping young gent," and though he had vague ideas as to the precise meaning of the term, it evidently implied something grand. How lowering to his pride it would be to confess that he was still under petticoat government, and obliged to yield subjection to a nurse!

He could not go back to ask her permission, and yet he knew he ought not to go without it; but he *could not* forego the treat of seeing the monkey perform again, more especially as he found this would be his last chance, as his new friend informed him that he was going on into the next county on the morrow, and would not be likely to revisit those parts again.

"And I'm teaching him a new dance—he's learning the hornpipe, is Jacko—and I'm going to put him through his figures to-day. At the next village I come to I'm going to make him show off; and he must earn enough to pay for our supper and bed—that's what he's got to do."

They were walking along side by side by this time, Courey having hastily smothered all rising scruples, and determined to follow his desires, which grew

stronger and stronger as the man held out more and more inducements. So he quieted his conscience by saying to himself he would run all the way back as soon as the performance was over, and nurse would scarcely have had time to miss him before he should be at home again.

He and his new friend, who informed him that he rejoiced in the name of Josiah Meek, soon fell into conversation, which beguiled the length of the way, and prevented Courcy's noticing that they were taking various short cuts and by-paths instead of going along the high road.

At length, however, they reached Belford, where Mr. Meek set up his little stand or platform. A crowd of village boys soon collected round it, open-eyed and open-mouthed with wonderment, and dumb with admiration and delight. Jacko, if possible, excelled himself, whilst Courcy's animated face showed his intense enjoyment and appreciation of the whole thing, especially the military air with which the little creature shouldered his rifle, and the vigorous manner in which he performed on his tiny drum.

The performance over, and it concluded amidst loud cheers from the little crowd, Jacko held his cap for contributions. Courcy, feeling as if he were in honour bound to be generous, having been admitted to an intimacy with which none of the others had been favoured, and being nothing loth to act the part of patron, dropped in a sixpence which he happened to

have in his pocket, and which was his only coin, with the exception of a solitary copper. The master took possession of the monkey's earnings, pocketing them so sharply that Courcy, though a little inquisitive on the subject, could not make out how much they amounted to.

"Well, Jacko, my man, you and I would like some supper now, I guess. We've earned it by a pretty long trudge to-day, so we'll just go in here and see what they can do for us."

They had been performing in front of the little inn which stood on one side of the village green. Upon an invitation from Mr. Meek, Courcy readily accompanied them; for it was so long past his tea-hour that he was beginning to feel the pangs of hunger.

After ordering a dish of eggs and bacon, the man led the way into the room in which it was to be served. It was a long, low apartment, with a sanded brick floor, two or three tables, and several chairs or benches. There was a window at either end, the one looking out upon the green, the other upon the little garden at the back, in which some cocks and hens were strutting about, or picking up whatever they could find that seemed in their line, whilst the head of a horse in the adjoining field appeared over the hedge, apparently watching their proceedings, and taking an almost patriarchal interest in them.

But as soon as the savoury viands were brought in, Courcy's investigations came to a close, for he was too



STRANGE COMPANIONS.

much occupied in satisfying the cravings of his appetite to have time for further observations.

Such delicious eggs and bacon he had never eaten ; and then the grandeur of supping like this at an inn—a thing he had never done in all his life before—was sufficient to make him feel intensely important. This was independence indeed ! and he began to look upon himself as quite a man of the world. This feeling increased when his friend, after pouring himself out a glass of beer, pushed the jug towards him, bidding him help himself. He would have liked to have imitated the other in everything, and thus to have felt on an equality with him, but he had such an aversion to that beverage that he could not bring himself to drink it. So he shook his head, and politely said, “No, thank you.”

“ You don’t like beer ! What is there, then, that you do like ? Call for what you want. You’ve only to say the word, you know, and they’ll bring it you.”

With an air of importance that was quite grand, Courcy followed his friend’s bidding, and lifting up his voice, made known, in accents loud enough to have penetrated to the cellars, his desire for *milk*.

The conversation which went on throughout the repast was not of a particularly high order—not exactly such as he was accustomed to hear at his grandpapa’s table—but it was of great interest to him, inasmuch as it consisted chiefly of anecdotes and information relating to the monkey, which was just then the object of

Courcy's enthusiastic admiration, and which, by this time, had condescended to respond to the boy's advances so far as to treat him with a certain degree of friendliness.

At length, however, the meal was concluded, and Josiah called for the bill. The landlady herself brought it in. Mr. Meek, instead of taking it, made a jerk with his head in Courcy's direction.

"What! Be I to give it to the young gent?" asked the buxom dame, glancing, with no little astonishment, from the one to the other of the strangely-contrasted pair.

Josiah nodded. "Ay, to be sure; he's the man for you. Why, you don't think, do you, as a gent like him would go and be beholden to a poor man for his supper? Shows you've never had nothing to do with gentlefolk if you don't know better than that."

"Well, then, sir, here's the bill, if you'll please to settle it," said the landlady, laying it down before the boy.

"I!" stammered Courcy, aghast; "I! Why, I haven't any money at all, except this penny!" And he turned out his pockets. "I put my last sixpence in Jacko's cap."

The man's manner underwent an abrupt change.

"Then what d'you mean by a-coming in here and feasting away like a prince, if you didn't intend to pay? D'you call that a honourable proceeding for a gentleman, I'd like to know," he blustered out, in loud tones.

"I—I thought you invited me," returned Courcy, who had never cast a thought to the probable expense of eggs and bacon, having vague notions that food of that sort came somehow from somewhere. Its costing much was a new idea to him ; he knew that chocolate and toffy could only be obtained for money, but those were dainties and rarities compared to common food at table. And now he was horrified as he glanced at the total of the bill which the landlady held in her hand.

Besides, Mr. Meek had said to him, "I'm going in here to have some supper ; will you come too ?" And he had agreed, with a polite "Thank you," just as he should have done had his grandpapa or any of his grandpapa's friends given him a similar invitation. Being called upon to settle the bill afterwards had certainly not entered into his calculations, any more than it would have occurred to him to propose to pay for his dinner at home. Neither had he realised that he was laying himself under great obligations in accepting the man's hospitality. Now, however, it all appeared in a new light ; he was gaining a little insight into the ways of the world.

"It's a likely thing, indeed, as I should be a-going and treating young gents to their suppers," retorted the man roughly, "when as often as not I've to go without any supper at all myself. A good joke that would be, I must say ! No, no ; Jos ain't *quite* so foolish as that. He thinks as gents may pay for their own grub ; and 'twouldn't hurt 'em sometimes to pay for a poor man's

as well into the bargain. But some of 'em is so stingy, to be sure ! I wonder they ain't ashamed of 'emselves!"

Courcy's rising colour showed that these remarks stung him, as well as the somewhat insolent tone of his companion.

"But what can I do ?" he asked, displaying his empty pockets. "I'd pay in a moment if I could ; but you see I've nothing with me—I haven't another six-pence belonging to me."

"Oh, it's all very well to try and sneak out of it like that ; but you can't come over me that way. If you ain't got no money yourself, you've got some friends somewhere as has, I guess ; you'd better look sharp, and go and borrow some of them."

"But grandpapa never allows me to borrow, or to get anything I can't pay for. I should never have come in here if I'd known."

"Come, now, if that ain't impudence, I should like to know what is—pretending as he thought *I* was a-going to fork out all the tin. I wouldn't be so mean for something !" sneered the other. "But, my fine fellow, you ain't a-going to get off like that, I can tell you," he added, in bullying tones. "You've got some parents, or somebody belonging to you in these parts, I s'pose ; so give the missus here their names, and let her put it down to them."

"I fancy I've seen the young gentleman's face before," remarked the hostess, putting in her word. "Haven't I seen you sometimes driving through here

in a carriage, and sitting alongside of a gentleman with a long beard?" she asked, turning to the boy.

"Yes; that's my grandpapa, Colonel Singleton."

"What! him as lives at the big house there at Brerethorpe, the next village to this?"

"Yes."

"And the colonel's your grandpapa, is he, my dear? Oh, well, he's safe enough; there ain't no fear but *he'll* pay, for he's an honourable gentleman, as all the country knows," said the landlady, who was accustomed to hear the characters of all the neighbouring gentry discussed pretty freely at her bar. "So you needn't bother your pretty head about it any more, my little master. Just you tell your grandpapa, when you get home, that there's a little account to settle here for some supper you've had, and there'll be an end of it."

Her words were reassuring, but the boy still looked doubtful.

"It'll be all right, take my word for it," she went on; "for a gentleman like him would never have wished you to have gone back hungry all that way without any supper."

"But I oughtn't ever to have come," said Courcy, with an uneasy feeling growing upon him as he mentally reviewed the events of the afternoon.

Until that moment he had been too much engrossed with all that was passing to have any leisure for reflection. But now as he thought of the independent

way in which he had been behaving, a misgiving crossed his mind as to how his proceedings would be regarded at home. He was conscious that he had acted wrongly ; and the striking of the cuckoo clock at that instant increased his uncomfortable feelings, reminding him as it did how much time had elapsed since he had crossed the stile, leaving Dora on the other side to wait for him.

"I say, I never guessed it was so late as that ! I must make haste back, or they'll be thinking I'm lost," he exclaimed, hastily seizing his cap.

"But you aren't going all alone, surely ?" said the landlady.

"Yes, I am. Why not ?"

"Well, it's a long, lonesome walk for a little gent like you ; and it'll be dark afore you can get there."

"I'm not afraid, if that is what you're thinking of," returned Courcy, in rather an off-hand manner.
"What is there to be afraid of ?"

"Well, you might lose your road, for one thing. Stop a minute, my dear, and let me think if there isn't anybody going your way who would be company for you. If it had been only yesterday, now, there was old Mr. Smith with his light cart in here, from just the other side of Brerethorpe, and he would have given you a lift back, and have taken good care of you too. But this evening there isn't a single person as I can think of going in your direction."

"But I don't want anybody ; I can go by myself

quite well," rejoined Courcy, enjoying the grandeur and independence of the whole thing, and feeling very important. "And I shall run all the way, to get home the quicker."

They were standing in the little porch, portly Mrs. Cox shading her eyes with her hand from the level beams of the sun, which came right into them and dazzled them, as she looked to right and left in hopes of espying somebody likely to prove a suitable companion for the young gentleman. But no one turned up, and she was forced to let the little boy depart alone. She stood looking after him as long as he was in sight.

"He don't seem to know what fear means, bless his brave little heart! but there's a many things as might happen to him on that lonely road," she murmured to herself as she turned to go indoors; and then other occupations, calling off her thoughts, put the little fellow out of her mind for the time.





CHAPTER V.

A NIGHT IN A WOOD.

Courcy Puzzled—A False Direction—In the Wood—Night comes on—Courcy's Meditations—A Wild Beast—Escape to a Tree—Misery and Repentance—A Welcome Horseman—Rescued at last—Mr. Cuthbert—Courcy tells him of the Wild Beast, and Learns what it was.



OURCY set off at a quick run, but it was impossible to keep up that pace the whole of the way. Want of breath after a time forced him to slacken his speed. Besides which there were such irresistible attractions in the hedgerow, in the shape of briar roses, handsome foxgloves,

and sweet-scented honeysuckle, that he could not pass them by unheeded.

The evening was so lovely, so light and clear, that he did not notice that the sun was sinking fast, and would before very long disappear from view. Had he done so, perhaps he might have pressed on more perseveringly, with the fear before him of being benighted. But it was not his nature to exercise much forethought, and accordingly, each time that the rich spoils in the hedges proved too tempting to be resisted, he lingered longer than he was aware, trying to possess himself of them.

It is true that every now and then, remembering how long it was since he had left nurse, and thinking what a scolding would most probably await him if he did not get back before dark, he quickened his pace, and ran as fast as he could for awhile. But again some object would catch his eye, and divert his thoughts, and cause him to loiter.

Hitherto his way had been straight and plain, but now he reached a point where several cross-roads met, and he stood for a moment to consider which he ought to take. For he had no very clear idea of his bearings, or in which direction Brerethorpe lay. Neither had he any recollection of the road, as in coming Mr. Meek had taken short cuts across the fields.

Thus he stood pondering, each instant growing more and more perplexed and uncertain, when he perceived a light cart coming towards him, in which were seated a man and a boy. In the latter he recognised Fred Gow.

"I want to know which is the way back to Brerethorpe," he shouted, as they came within hearing.

"Along that road there," returned Fred, interrupting the other as he was about to reply, and jerking his head in the direction intimated. "But what are *you* doing here, I should like to know? Little boys like you oughtn't to be out without their nurses," he added, sneeringly. "You've been playing the runaway, I expect. Well, I wish you joy of the consequences, that's all."

Then with a grin, that had in it a look of malicious satisfaction, as if he were enjoying some secret triumph over his late foe and vanquisher (for Courcy had not long since given him a thrashing), the boy touched up the horse, and made him start off at a brisk trot.

Courcy applied himself to his homeward journey, following the directions given him. He had not gone very far, however, before he found that the road he was taking terminated in a sort of wood, or extensive plantation, as it appeared, enclosed by a high hedge and a strong five-barred gate, bristling with thorns, entwined in it for the purpose of making it a more effectual barrier.

It might have occurred to Courcy that this did not look much like a high road between two villages; for on the other side of the gate, in the wood itself, the path was perfectly moss-grown and overrun with bramble. But he did not stop to reason. Trusting to Fred's instructions, and never suspecting he might

have been misdirected, he made vigorous efforts to squeeze himself through a little gap at the side of the gate; for, owing to the thorns interlaced in it, climbing over it was an impossibility. After a good deal of pushing and struggling, he emerged on the other side; not, however, without having done considerable damage to his clothes, and having received numerous scratches on hands and face.

"What a jolly place!" he exclaimed to himself, as, walking on, he came upon an open grassy glade in the midst of fine old forest trees, which stood thickly on either side, stretching as far as he could see, with a wild luxuriant growth of bracken spreading underneath their arching boughs.

The slant mellow rays of the sun were making beautiful little bits of warm colouring wherever they glanced, whether upon the gnarled old trunks threaded with delicate lace-work of green, gray, or yellow lichen, or certain sprays of foliage which they seemed to bathe in some magic flood of golden hue, or the light fronds of the bracken, which waved gently in the summer breeze; everything joyfully reflected back the rich yet tender glow of the setting sun.

The bramble bushes, which spread out in unrestrained freedom around, were covered with delicate white or pale peach blossoms, giving promise of an abundant crop of blackberries in the autumn, and making Courcy mentally exclaim, "Don't I wish it was time for them now! What a jolly lot I should

be able to gather, for they grow close to the ground here, instead of right at the top of a great high hedge, as they generally do, in the most provoking way, just out of one's reach."

At first, no doubt, it was pleasant enough, sauntering along on the grassy sward or soft moss-covered path, but after a while the trees seemed to close in more, shutting out the little light that was left. No more bright sunbeams penetrated through their thick foliage, for the sun had gone down, and only a few rosy-tinted clouds hanging in the blue expanse overhead remained to testify to the glory that had been.

It was dark and gloomy in the wood now, and Courcy would gladly have found his way out of it, but the farther he walked the deeper he seemed to be plunging into it, and he had quite lost all idea of the direction in which he ought to go; for he had been wandering hither and thither, as one thing after another had allured him, until he was unable even to tell on which side he had entered. For another hour or more he wandered about, scarcely able, by this time, to see a few paces before him, and every now and then stumbling over some unperceived log, or getting his feet entangled in the trailing brambles or creeping ivy, until at last, quite tired out, he sank down on a fallen trunk to rest awhile, and consider what was to be done.

He was beginning to be in despair of finding his way out of the wood; and if he did not get out what would become of him? He would have to spend the

night there ; and that was no pleasant prospect, even for Courcy, with his love of adventure. For it was getting chilly now, and he was tired and hungry.

It was long past his bed-time, he knew ; and he began to wonder what they were doing at home, and whether they were looking for him. Oh, if somebody would only come and find him ! and a little sob broke from him as he thought of Dora, snugly tucked into her bed in the safe pleasant nursery, and then contemplated his own fate, left to spend the night all alone in that great wood.

And it was getting darker every minute. Soon he would not even be able to see his hand before him. He had always boasted he wasn't afraid of the dark, but anything so lonely and dreary as this he had never imagined. He knew he had brought it all upon himself—not that that made it any the pleasanter, but quite the contrary—and bitterly did he now regret having gone after the monkey.

"I know I oughtn't have done it—at least, not without asking nurse's leave," he thought to himself ; "and so now I am being punished for it. Oh, dear ! won't anybody come and find me ? I think they might, for if they were lost I'm sure I'd go and look for them ; but of course they don't know where I am. They'd never think of looking in this place ; and so, perhaps, when morning comes, I shall be found dead of cold or something, like the Babes in the Wood. I wonder if nurse will say then, 'Serve him right ! teach

him to know better another time,' as she does whenever I hurt myself in climbing places she thinks are too 'venturesome,' as she calls it. But no; she couldn't say that exactly, because if I were dead I couldn't go doing it another time. I wonder whether she'd be glad not to be bothered with me any more, or whether she'd be sorry for me, just a little wee bit. I'm sure Dorey would, though I do break her dolls."

But the thought of Dora proved too much for him, joined to the doleful picture he had conjured up, in which he saw himself stretched cold and stiff on the ground, half covered with leaves in the orthodox fashion, his little sister crying over him ready to break her heart, granny shedding tears, and even nurse perhaps wiping her eyes, forgetting his misdeeds in pity for the sad fate which had overtaken him. A few little half-stifled sobs escaped him—it was so very melancholy.

Feelings of penitence, too, mingled with other thoughts.

"I've been a naughty boy, a *very naughty* boy," he reflected, "and I suppose I deserve it all. But I should like to ask them to forgive me, and tell them how sorry I am. I *should* like to have just one more kiss from granny, and Dorey, and grandpapa, and nurse, and papa if he wasn't all that way off in India, and *everybody*. I hope I shan't be *quite* dead when they find me, but just alive enough to speak and tell them all about it; because how else will they know I'm sorry? and——"

His meditations, which were becoming of such a

very sombre hue, were suddenly interrupted at this point by some movement close behind him, which made him spring to his feet with the startled cry—"What's that?"

What was it indeed? His little heart beat fast; for he heard something moving amongst the dry under-wood, making a crackling and rustling sound; and then, in the dim light, he saw indistinctly some form slowly approaching, as he thought. He had fancied himself quite alone. What could this shadowy figure be? For as far as he could make out in the darkness, it was not that of a human being, but of some animal.

"A wild beast!" was his hasty conclusion, and he turned and fled up the nearest tree for safety, clambering up like a cat or a monkey, in the excitement of the moment, until he had reached a secure perch up aloft.

Then he paused to listen; but the sounds grew more and more indistinct, until he was not sure whether he really heard anything or whether it was all fancy.

"At all events, I'll stay where I am," he concluded, curling himself up into the most comfortable position he could manage.

He had been growing rather drowsy before this sudden alarm, but now he was wide awake, with his busy little mind ready to start off on some fresh line of thought. Instead of giving himself up to an early and untimely end, and picturing his afflicted relatives standing over him weeping and bewailing his fate, he indulged in the thoughts of all the things he should

have to relate concerning this night's adventures. He felt that in Dora's eyes he should be quite an hero. "And Luke will think something of me, I expect, when he hears how I escaped the wild beasts," he mused, with some little exultation.

"I don't believe even grandpapa himself ever had such a night of it; and as to Dorey, *she* wouldn't like it, I know; nor granny neither. And I'm getting so awfully hungry, too! How I wish I could find something to eat, like people who are cast away on desert islands always do. And this is just as bad, I'm sure. I wonder what the time is? I wonder how soon it will be morning? It seems an awfully long night; I never thought a night *could* be so long. Oh, dear! don't I wish I was safe home in bed! Catch me running after monkeys again—that is, if ever I do get home; but I don't believe I ever shall." And again his thoughts assumed a doleful complexion.

The stillness and the loneliness were becoming almost insupportable. Brave and fearless little fellow as he was, it was a trying ordeal for him. The moments, as they passed by, seemed like hours. He fought for a long time with the rising inclination to give way to tears, for he always considered it babyish to indulge in such weaknesses; it was for girls and women to cry, he considered, not for men and boys, especially boys who meant one day to be soldiers.

But it was so lonely and so dreary; besides which he was growing faint with his long fast—for it seemed

ages since that supper of eggs and bacon at the village inn ; almost a month at least since he had set off to run home, and had met Fred Gow and asked his way of him, and had entered the wood and not seen a creature to speak to ; whilst there seemed no chance now of anybody ever coming to take him out of that horrible place.

So the poor little fellow, quite worn out with fatigue, and overcome with the misery of his situation, at last let his head droop upon his hands, and sobbed aloud.

He longed so sorely to be able to throw himself into granny's arms, and hear the comforting, soothing tones of her voice—for she would be sorry for him, he was quite sure, if she knew how miserable he was. He would be thankful, he felt, only to hear *nurse's* voice, even if it was raised in a more terrible scolding than any he had ever received from her. But no one came to him. Everybody seemed to have forgotten him.

His sobs were fast getting beyond his control, when suddenly a sound broke upon his ear. He raised his head and listened intently, his tears and sobs stilled in a moment.

It was the sound of a horse's hoofs cantering along a road, and drawing nearer and nearer.

With a wild cry of delight, followed by loud shouts to attract attention, he scrambled down from his perch in desperate haste, and made his way, as best he could among all the obstacles in his path, towards the part whence the sounds came.

"Hi, there! stop, stop!" he shouted, at the top of his voice. "There's a boy here lost in the wood! Stop, will you? I say—*stop!*"

The last words were shrieked out with all the energy of despair, as he heard the animal's hoofs still clattering along the road, and feared he was passing on.

"Oh! stop, there!" he implored, in shrill tones, as he struggled on, stumbling and falling over prostrate logs or the roots of trees, or catching his feet in the long grass, for his headlong haste, combined with the darkness, made his progress but slow.

But now answering shouts came back to him, and guided by them he at length staggered out from under the shadow of the trees and found himself in an open space. After the deep gloom of the wood it seemed comparatively light there, especially as the moon, which had risen by this time, shone out at that moment from behind a cloud, revealing the figure of a man on horseback standing awaiting him.

"So you had lost yourself in the wood, had you, my little man?" said the stranger, bending down towards the child, and speaking in accents that were unmistakably those of a gentleman. "It is a good thing I came along this way, or you might have had to spend the whole night there, for there aren't many passing through the park at this hour. But how came you here, in the first place?"

Courcy explained that he was on his way back to Brerethorpe.



COURNEY AND THE STRANGER (*p. 76*).

"But what made you take such a very roundabout road, my boy? No one going there from Belford would ever dream of coming round by Maynell Park, unless they wished to prolong their walk by a couple of miles or so."

Courcy told how he had followed Fred Gow's directions.

"Well, at all events, the first thing we must do now is to make haste and get you home again," said the newcomer. "Your friends must be terribly anxious about you by this time. Do you think you can ride in front of me here? Your weight won't make much difference to old Hannibal, and he's a gentle creature," he added, stroking the animal's arched neck and silky mane.

Courcy was delighted with the arrangement, and with his new friend's strong arm round him sat securely enough, enjoying his moonlight ride, and chattering as fast as his little tongue could go; for in the joy of being rescued from his late position his spirits rose to their highest pitch.

He soon told his story, relating all the events of the afternoon, and ending by asking, somewhat anxiously, if the other thought they would be *very* angry with him at home.

"I think, perhaps, when they hear all you have gone through they may be disposed to condone the offence. Besides, it was not your fault that you got into this place, because you were misdirected."

"But it was my fault that I went after the man with the monkey; and if I hadn't done that, you know,

I shouldn't have been coming back all that way by myself."

"I see. It's rather a clear case against you, I must confess. But I don't think any punishment they could give you would be as bad as spending the night alone in that wood."

"No; that was dreadfully lonely. How glad I am you came by! What *should* I have done if you hadn't!" And the child turned and glanced gratefully up into the face of his deliverer.

It was a countenance to attract confidence, being full of kindness and benevolence. The stranger was altogether a rather striking-looking man, with a tall commanding figure, which was still upright and vigorous, though his snowy beard and the wrinkles time had set on his face seemed to say that he could not be much less than three score years and ten. His smile was particularly sweet and winning, and his easy manner made the boy feel at home with him at once.

"You haven't told me your name yet," remarked Courcy, abruptly, turning round again and facing his companion. "What is it?"

"Cuthbert," was the brief reply.

"Cuthbert!" echoed the child. "I've never known anybody with that name yet. And do you live near here, Mr. Cuthbert?"

"Yes, not very far off."

"And you said this place was called Maynell Park, didn't you? To whom does it belong?"

"It belongs to me."

"To *you!* And does all that wood belong to you, too?"

"Yes."

"Then if I were you I'd *burn it all down*. I wouldn't have such a horrid place, full of wild beasts, and I don't know what else."

"I wasn't aware there were any wild beasts there. Did you hear them roaring?"

"No," Courcy was forced to confess; "I didn't hear them roaring, but one came and startled me dreadfully, making a great crackling behind me among the dry twigs."

"And what did you do?"

"I climbed up a tree to be out of its way."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the other, apparently much amused. "Shall I tell you what your wild beast was, my boy? It could have been nothing more than one of the deer in the park, strayed in there by mistake."

Courcy felt rather crestfallen. If this was true, then there was an end of the exciting stories of hair-breadth escapes with which he had meant to entertain Luke, and which were to have made such an impression upon Dora.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Quite sure. There are no other animals in the park—at least in that part of it."

"What a coward I was, then," laughed the boy, "to

be afraid of a *deer*. Papa would say I should never do for a soldier."

"I don't wonder at your being startled, for in the dark it was natural enough you should fancy the intruder more formidable than he really was. I don't think you have shown any lack of courage, my boy."

"But a soldier shouldn't be afraid of anything; and I want to be a soldier some day."

"Do you, my little fellow? Then I hope you will make a brave, true one. But I don't know that they are *never afraid of anything*. I am an old soldier myself; and I have always considered there are some things every truly brave man *ought* to fear."

"Oh! what are they? what can they be?" asked Courcy, with great interest; but at that moment they reached the gates of the Manor, and he had to content himself with a promise from his kind old friend that the question should be answered some other time.





CHAPTER VI.

LORD ST. OSYTH.

Courcy gets Home again—The Earl of St. Osyth—Courcy gets off pretty well—Lord St. Osyth pays him a Visit—And gives him an Invitation.



THE clatter of horse's hoofs on the gravel was heard distinctly in the silence of the midnight hour, and those who were keeping anxious vigil within hastened to the door, in a tumult of conflicting hopes and fears—dreading lest it should be a messenger with evil tidings; longing to find that it was the lost one brought back again.

The hall door was standing wide open by the time Hannibal stopped before it. Colonel and Mrs. Singleton were waiting on the door-step, with anxious eyes trying to pierce through the darkness. Nurse was not very far behind, whilst

William's tall figure showed itself in the background ; Luke, too, was lurking among the bushes. He had just returned from another fruitless search, which had made the colonel determine to go out himself on the quest, and he had sent orders that his horse should be saddled for him. Luke was on his way to the yard with the message when the sound of approaching hoofs made him linger.

He only stayed to satisfy himself that the young master really had come back safe and sound, and then he hurried away to be the bearer of the good news to dwellers in the back part of the house ; for there was not a single servant who had felt she could go to bed and sleep whilst the fate of the little fellow, who had so endeared himself to one and all, was still uncertain.

Sincere and hearty were the expressions of joy and relief on finding that all cause for anxiety was over. But now curiosity was excited to know where he had been all this time, and what he had been doing. They crowded round Luke, to extract all the information they possibly could out of him ; but it was of the scantiest.

“Do you know who 'twas brought him back ?” they asked eagerly.

“Well, I can't say for *sartin*,” returned Luke, slowly, “but I'm pretty nigh sure as 'twas th' earl himself ;” and then he shut his lips tightly together, and looked around, as if conscious that he had produced a sensation.

“The earl !” echoed his listeners. “What earl ?”

“Him as lives at Maynell Park.”

“What makes you think it was him ?”

" Well, I see'd him once, a goodish while ago ; and there ain't much danger of mistaking him, for he's a mighty grand-looking gentleman, I can tell you. Besides, I heard him call out to master as he rode up : ' I've brought your little runaway back to you all safe and sound. He had lost his way in Maynell Wood.' "

" But it mightn't be the earl himself. He might have sent somebody back with the child," reasoned one of the audience.

" That just shows as *you've* never set eyes on him," retorted Luke, contemptuously. " If you had, you'd have knowed I couldn't have took him for nobody else," he added, seeming to have argued himself into a degree of certainty on the point which he had not felt at starting.

Meantime, the meeting between the little truant and his grandparents may be better imagined than described.

Mrs. Singleton, whose nerves during this long agony of suspense had been strained to their highest pitch, could scarcely restrain tears of thankfulness at finding her darling restored to her, and in the overpowering joy of the moment almost forgot to thank his kind preserver. The colonel, however, in his usual frank, courteous manner, supplied any deficiencies on her part ; and the stranger, refusing to dismount, rode off, saying he should come on the morrow to call on his young friend and see how he was after his adventure, though he trusted it would have no ill effect on him.

Courcy was relieved, if not astonished, to find himself received with warm embraces and made much of, instead of being greeted with the grave, displeased looks and the scolding he had felt were his due. But he did not know how great had been the anxiety and how terrible the uncertainty on his account; nor, consequently, how deep the thankfulness at his safe restoration.

Excited by his ride and all the events of the evening, he was quite wide awake and ready to give an animated account of all that had happened to him; of his being lost in the wood, and being found by his new friend.

"Wasn't it fortunate Mr. Cuthbert happened to come along just then?" he wound up by saying.

"Mr. Cuthbert! Who do you mean?" inquired his grandpapa.

"The gentleman who brought me home. I asked him his name, and he said 'Cuthbert.'"

"And so you called him *Mr. Cuthbert*, did you?" laughed the colonel. "He must have been amused."

"Why? Isn't that his proper name?"

"It may be one of them; but he is generally called the Earl of St. Osyth. And Maynell Park belongs to him."

"Yes, he told me so," returned Courcy, apparently but little impressed with his new friend's greatness, "and I said if I were in his place I would burn down that great horrid wood, so that people shouldn't get lost in it."

"I'm sure I hope he doesn't intend to take your

advice, for it is the largest wood the county can boast of, and quite an ornament to it."

"My poor little Courcy, to think of your being left there alone, and in the dark too, all these hours ! Weren't you frightened, darling ?" said grandmamma, with a sort of shudder.

The boy would have liked to have answered, "No ;" but truth compelled him to admit that he had not felt quite comfortable in the near neighbourhood of the supposed wild beast, which, after all, had turned out to be only a deer.

The recital made the colonel laugh ; though grandmamma only clasped her brave, truthful boy the closer to her breast.

"You must have some supper now, my boy—for I daresay you are famishing—and then you must go to bed, for it is much too late for any sitting up longer. To-morrow we will hear all the rest of your adventures."

Courcy, who had been sitting on her knee, rose to go.

"I cannot scold you now, darling," she went on, taking his hands in hers, "for your thoughtlessness in running off as you did, and causing us such hours of anxiety ; for I can only feel for the present the intense relief and thankfulness of having you back safe and sound. But you shouldn't have done it, dear ; though, of course, you never thought it would lead to your being lost and benighted in Maynell Wood. I think you have already been punished sufficiently by what you must

have gone through during all that time of solitude and darkness."

"I know I've been a naughty boy, granny," was the candid response ; "and in the wood, when I thought perhaps I should never get out again, I did long to ask you to forgive me."

Kisses of forgiveness were lavishly showered upon the dear little upturned face, which now wore a penitent expression.

"I won't do such a thing again, granny ; indeed I won't. I'll try to think," he said, earnestly ; and Mrs. Singleton could not find it in her heart to add another word of blame. With a fond embrace, she sent him off to nurse to get his supper, saying she should come to pay him a visit as soon as he was in bed.

Mrs. Cardle's transports are not to be described ; neither the way in which she hugged and cried over her boy, who, having escaped one set of perils, was now in danger of being suffocated by the closeness of her embraces.

Like Mrs. Singleton, she found it impossible to say much in the way of reproach ; it was such joy to have all anxiety laid to rest, and to look once more upon the bright, handsome little face which made such sunshine in the house. Those few hours' experience had shown how grievous a thing it would be ever to miss him from their midst, how it would almost be like losing the sun out of the heavens, so great a blank would his absence cause.

"BESIDE HIS LITTLE COUCH" (p. 91).



Mrs. Singleton came in to say a last good-night as soon as she heard from nurse that Courcy was in bed. Alone with him, on her knees beside his little couch, she relieved her full heart by giving thanks, in a few simple words, for the little fellow's preservation. The little life was very precious to her, and not to her alone; there was the absent father, on whose account her heart had ached during those long hours of suspense, when they knew not every moment what tidings might be brought them. So no wonder that her thanksgiving was deep and warm.

And Dora, who, having cried herself to sleep, had fallen into such a deep slumber that even the sounds of Courcy's arrival did not disturb her, was so full of joy and delight on awakening in the morning to find that he was back again safe and sound, that she scarcely knew how to contain her gladness, or how to make enough of her brother and playfellow.

In the afternoon Lord St. Osyth redeemed his word by coming to pay his promised visit. Courcy had been looking out for him ever since his eyes had opened that morning; though, to be sure, that had not been so early as usual, as after his long vigil of the previous night he had slept late, nurse having taken good care that he should not be disturbed.

But his chief thought all day had been the promised call from his new friend; and as soon as he heard the carriage stop at the door, and had ascertained from his post of observation upstairs who the new-comer was, he

started off and rushed helter-skelter downstairs, almost falling into the nobleman's arms at the bottom.

"Gently, gently, my man!" exclaimed Lord St. Osyth, with a smile at his impetuosity. "There is no need for such headlong haste; unless, indeed, you are fleeing from some wild beast," he added, mischievously.

"Don't," said Courcy, with a little laugh, as he took hold of the other's hand and led him into the drawing-room, the door of which William was holding open.

There was no want of cordiality in the reception the earl met with from both Colonel and Mrs. Singleton; and over and over again would they have thanked him for the kind part he had acted in bringing home their little truant so promptly to them—for it was no small kindness, they felt, for a man of his age to extend his ride by several miles at that late hour of the night—but he would not allow anything more to be said on the subject.

"I am only so glad and thankful that I happened to be riding past at that time. I was coming home from a dinner at W—, and being unusually late, I thought of taking the shorter but less pleasant cut across the other end of the park. The beauty of the night, however, tempted me to choose the better though longer road, and rejoiced I am that I did so. I had sent my man straight home, though, as I thought he might not be of the same mind as myself; and thus I came to be alone. So there was nothing for it but to perch Master



"COURCY HAD BEEN LOOKING OUT FOR HIM" (p. 91).

Courcy before me on old Hannibal, and ride round with him."

"And I did enjoy the ride so," interposed the boy, who was sitting on his friend's knee. "Will you take me for another some day?" he added, coaxingly.

"We will see what we can do," promptly returned the earl, seeing that Colonel Singleton was about to check the child.

"And now I am going to ask *you* to do *me* a kindness," he went on, addressing Mrs. Singleton. "I want to ask if you will be willing sometimes to spare this bright little fellow to come and see me. I am a solitary old man," he went on, with an expression of melancholy crossing his fine open countenance, "and it will do me good to have a little visitor to enliven me sometimes. I shall look upon it as quite a favour if you will lend him to me for the day now and then, and I will promise to return him safely in the evening. Besides, for the honour of Maynell Wood, which he advises me to burn down, I should like to show him that in broad daylight it is by no means the '*horrid place*' he thought it last night."

Courcy's sparkling eyes showed his satisfaction at the proposal, and the desired promise was given. Before the earl left, he had arranged to drive over the following morning and take the little fellow back to spend the rest of the day with him.

"You'll come early, won't you, Mr. Cuthbert?" said Courcy, as he accompanied his friend across the hall.

"But I forgot," he added, correcting himself; "your name isn't Mr. Cuthbert properly, is it? Grandpapa said it was something else."

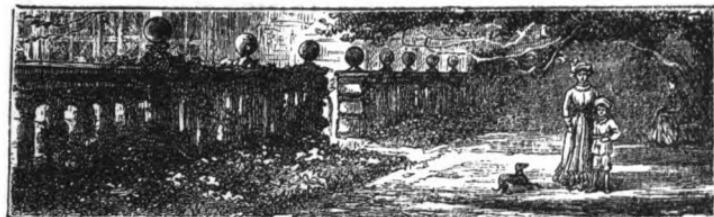
"At any rate, *you* can call me Mr. Cuthbert. You had better keep to your first name for me: it is easier for you than the other."

"But why did you say, last night, it *was* Cuthbert?" asked the child, with a doubtful, perplexed look on his boyish face, as if troubled by the fear that his new friend, who had already so completely won his heart, had stated what was not strictly correct.

"Because it *is* Cuthbert, my boy, just in the same way that yours is Courcy. Good-bye, my little fellow. Be ready for me to-morrow, and we'll have a grand exploration of Maynell Wood together, and make a crusade against all the wild beasts there."

Courcy laughed good-humouredly, waving his hand at the same time in a parting salute as the carriage drove off.

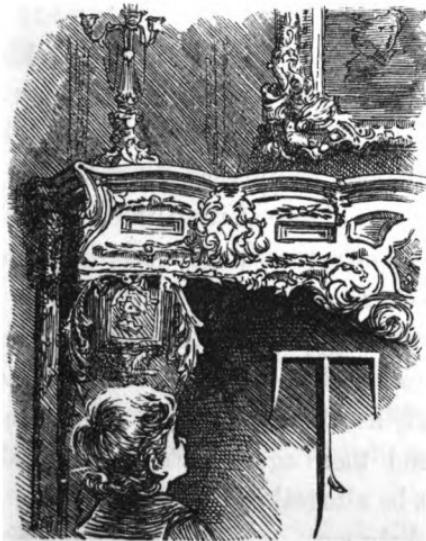




CHAPTER VII.

A VISIT TO MAYNELL CASTLE.

Courcy's Visit—The Earl's Sorrow—Portraits of Lord Maynell—The Bust—Courcy breaks it!—The Irreparable Damage—A Frank Confession—A Good Man's Patience—The Wood by Daylight—The Earl talks to Courcy about True Courage—And about Battle and Victory.



HE next day was lovely ; and in high spirits Courcy took his seat in the carriage beside his kind old friend to accompany him back to Maynell Park. He was sorry to leave dear little Dora behind, for he had scarcely ever yet had a pleasure in which she had not shared ;

but he made up his mind he would tell the earl all about her, and then he would be sure to want to see her. He

was not quite sure whether it was any good to hope that she might be included in any future invitations given to himself to Maynell, because she was too young to be allowed to go out visiting without nurse, and perhaps nurses were not quite in his new friend's line.

But, at any rate, he must know all about his little sister; and so he chattered about her as they drove along.

There was just time before luncheon to explore the grounds near the house, and then the gong sounded, and they repaired to the dining-room. It was a large apartment, and everything in it appeared very grand to Courey.

But what, more than anything else, attracted his attention was a portrait in oils hanging over the chimney-piece; and perhaps he noticed it chiefly because the earl's eyes so frequently, and as it were involuntarily, turned from his own face to glance at it. And as he did so, a look of melancholy swept over his face, like the returning wave sweeps over the sand.

It was a look that often fell upon it. Shadow after shadow of sadness constantly flitted across it—there one moment, gone the next, as the interests of others engrossed his thoughts, and then again back it would all come, as if it could not be altogether banished.

But if sad—melancholy even—there was no repining no trace of restless discontent in the expression of the noble countenance; it only seemed to tell a close observer

of some secret grief, some life-long, ever-present trouble, which was being borne patiently and taken up bravely, but which, all the same, pressed heavily. Only on himself, however. He seemed resolved that on no one else should its shadow fall ; and no one could be found more ready to enter into the joys of others, to promote their pleasures, or even join in their innocent gaiety, than he who appeared to have long ago bid adieu to joy as a personal visitant.

Lord St. Osyth's was a grand, beautiful face ; but it was not more beautiful than the mind of which it was but the reflection.

The picture towards which the earl's eyes—and those of Courcy following them—so often turned represented a boy of about Courcy's age, a bright, handsome little fellow, with golden hair and large blue eyes—a face unclouded and undimmed as yet, intelligent, and apparently full of promise. There was a striking likeness between it and Lord St. Osyth's own face, save about the mouth ; for whilst that feature in the latter was firm and resolute, in the child it was weak and wavering—a mouth that betokened a sad want of strength and force of character.

“ What a pretty picture ! ” remarked Courcy. “ Is it a painting of you when you were a little boy ? ”

“ No, my child. I don't think I was ever such a pretty little fellow as the lad that picture represents.”

"But it is something like you. Was it your little boy, then? Have you any little boys? Oh! do tell me about them, Mr. Cuthbert," cried Courcy, eagerly.

Again that wave of sorrow swept over the grand old face.

"Yes, that was my little boy," answered the earl, in a low tone.

"And is he dead?" asked the child, involuntarily dropping his voice as he noticed the changed look on the countenance of the other.

"No; he is not dead. He is grown up. He is a young man now."

"And does he live here with you? Shall I see him?"

"No; he lives in London."

"But he comes to see you sometimes, doesn't he? I should like to know him if he is like you. Though perhaps he doesn't care for little boys. Nurse says only a few people do, because they are generally such plagues. But *you* don't dislike them, do you?" asked Courcy, lifting his dark eyes to those of his friend.

"No, indeed, my little fellow," returned Lord St. Osyth, laying his hand kindly upon the curly head beside him; for Courcy, in his eagerness about the picture, had left his seat, and was standing leaning against the earl. "I am very fond of them: But now, as we have both done luncheon, suppose we leave

the dining-room, and see what amusements we can find for the afternoon."

As it was too hot to go out of doors directly, Courcy was entrusted to the care of the housekeeper, to be taken round the castle and shown all that was likely to interest him, whilst the earl rested for a little while in the library.

Mrs. Rossiter, with her genial motherly disposition, was nothing loth to have the task of entertaining for a time such a bright, engaging little fellow, who, as she afterwards said, reminded her so much of what the young lord had been himself at his age, that she almost wondered the earl could bear to look on him. "But this one has a way with him that makes one fancy he could say 'no,' when there was a need for it; and that the other never could learn to do," she added.

Courcy was taken through all the state rooms, which were the grandest he had ever seen, but all their magnificence failed to impress him so much as the fine collection of armour, of various dates and countries, which was hung round the square, spacious, marble-floored hall. He seemed in his element here, and asked more questions than Mrs. Rossiter was able to answer.

But it would take too long to describe all that was to be seen in the fine old castle. Suffice it to say that Courcy found plenty of amusement, and came upon several portraits of the little boy downstairs

—portraits taken at different periods, until the last represented him as a tall, handsome young Guardsman.

"He hasn't been taken now for a good while," remarked Mrs. Rossiter, with a little sigh.

How was it that everybody sighed or looked sad when he was mentioned? Courcy wondered to himself. He felt a little inquisitive on the subject. Had he been a very naughty boy? Still, he was a man now, and too old to be naughty, as he thought. But all he knew yet was that his Christian name was Richard, though Mrs. Rossiter called him Lord Maynell, and he was the only son of the earl.

Courcy showed so much interest in all that concerned him, that at length Mrs. Rossiter led the way into the apartments that were still called his, though he had not slept within the walls of the castle for several years now, she said.

"Why doesn't he come?" asked Courcy. "I'm sure if this was *my* home I'd come back to it."

"More especially if you'd a father like the earl; though it wouldn't be easy to match him," rejoined the other. "He does seem to deserve a good son, if anybody ever did. Not that I'm saying a word against Lord Maynell—it wouldn't be my place to be doing that," she added, as if feeling she had been guilty of an indiscretion in admitting as much as she had already done. But it was rather her way to speak

without reflection, and then endeavour to recall her words.

"There, this was his bed-room ; and this"—passing through a door opening out of it—"was his study. It's a pleasant room, isn't it? And see what a lovely view there is from the windows."

"And is this where he used to do his lessons when he was a boy ?"

"Yes, and where he used to make his litters, for he used to try his hand at all kinds of things when he came home in the holidays from Eton. See, this is a bust taken of him at that time. Isn't it a bonnie face? Ah! he was a fine promising young fellow then."

The bust, or rather head, to which she referred, was a small plaster-of-Paris cast standing on a bracket placed against the wall. After looking at it for a moment or two, Mrs. Rossiter passed on to point out all the different views to be obtained from the spacious bay window.

"You can see pretty nearly as far as Brerethorpe at this side," she remarked, as she stood looking out with her back turned to the rest of the room; "and straight over there you can make out—Good gracious! Whatever is that?" she exclaimed, turning sharply round as her speech was interrupted by a sudden crash.

She thought Courcy had followed her as she crossed the long room, but instead of doing so he had lingered

to examine further the bust of the schoolboy. Mounting upon a chair and standing on tip-toe, he stretched out his hand to turn it round, in order that he might have a better view of it; but not being sure of his balance, his touch was less gentle than he had intended, and with a sudden lurch forward he sent the bracket—which was not secured so firmly as it might have been—swinging round, whilst the bust fell to the ground, after striking first against the sharp edge of Courcy's chair, and he himself, quite losing his balance, toppled over after it.

No wonder that Mrs. Rossiter uttered a startled cry of dismay. She hastened first to pick up the child and assure herself that he was not hurt; for she expected an immediate burst of screams, and his silence alarmed her for the moment more than any outcry would have done. Having satisfied herself that he had sustained no great damage, she next glanced, with a look of consternation, at the shattered fragments of the bust; whilst Courcy, putting his hands behind his back, stood looking the picture of despair.

“ Dear, dear ! to think that this of all things should have happened ! ” exclaimed the housekeeper, in tones of regret and vexation ; “ for the earl sets such store by this bust, as it was taken in the happy days when the young lord was only an innocent schoolboy, and as loving to his father as anybody could wish. Ah ! how well I remember the Christmas—and so does the earl, too—when the countess gave it to him as a



"HE HIMSELF . . . TUMPLED OVER AFTER IT" (P. 104).

little present, and he was so surprised and pleased. It used to stand in his dressing-room until, about a year or two ago, he brought it in here, and placed it there with his own hands. He never said a word about it, but I always thought it was because it was too painful to him now to have it always before his eyes. But, dear, dear! I believe he'd rather have lost half his land than have had that broken, for it was the last Christmas present the countess gave him. She was gone before the next year came round."

Courcy was speechless with dismay. He felt inclined to turn and flee, and run as fast as he could all the way back to Brerethorpe, and never see the earl again.

But he knew that would be very cowardly; so he must stay and face it out. His face lengthened considerably, though, at the prospect; whilst he felt so grieved at what he had done that it would have been a relief could he have indulged in a good howl over it. Mrs. Rossiter's presence, however, restrained him.

"I don't know how I shall ever manage to tell his lordship, I'm sure," she pursued. "I'd about as soon tell him the castle was burnt down, that I would; for it's quite past mending," she added, disconsolately picking up a few fragments, and trying in vain to piece them together. "I wonder if it would be best to leave him to find it out, for I must say I don't like the job of telling him."

"I don't want you to tell him; I shall do it myself," said Courcy, speaking for the first time. "Grandpapa always tells me to go and own a thing at once."

A look of mingled surprise and admiration passed over the countenance of the other.

"Bless you, my boy! you'll be acting like a brave little man indeed if you do that. But I never thought you'd have the courage for it."

"I mustn't be a coward, or papa and grandpapa would be ashamed of me; and it would be like a coward to try and hide it up. But how dreadfully unlucky I am!" he added, regretfully, with a woe-begone expression on his face as he contemplated the scattered fragments of the much-prized little statuette.

At that moment they heard an advancing step in the corridor, and involuntarily glanced at one another, thinking it was the earl himself. The poor little culprit looked as if he would have liked to run and hide himself away from sight; but, nevertheless, he stood his ground.

Instead of the earl, however, it proved to be only a footman bringing a message from Lord St. Osyth, saying that if Master Singleton would like to come now, he was ready to go out to the wood with him.

"His lordship is in the library, if you will follow me, sir."

Courcy did so, though in no very enviable frame of mind, thinking to himself, as he went down the stairs, that smashing the conservatory or breaking Dora's dolls was nothing to this last catastrophe, and devoutly wishing he had never set foot in the castle, or at least had had the sense to remember that it was never safe for *him* to touch *anything*.

The footman opened the door, and then closed it behind him. The child paused irresolutely for a moment before advancing farther into the room. It was a very large one, and not until he had taken a glance all around did he perceive the earl, who was sitting in an easy chair near one of the great oriel windows.

Laying down the paper he had been reading, Lord St. Osyth held out his hand towards the little boy, saying—

“ I thought it was a pity to put off our walk any longer, as you can see the castle any time. It would be amusement for a wet day. But what is the matter, my boy? You look as if things had not been going on pleasantly. Haven’t you and Mrs. Rossiter got on well together? or hasn’t she been able to find anything to interest you? ”

“ It isn’t that,” returned Courcy, who had advanced into the room by this time, and was now standing beside the earl’s chair.

“ What is it, then, my boy? ”

“ I’ve been getting into another scrape. I always

am getting into scrapes," he said, in a tone of despair at the thought of his many delinquencies. "I ought to have told you that before I came here."

Lord St. Osyth laughed. "And what is the scrape you have got into now? Who are you in disgrace with?"

"With you."

"*Me?*"

"Yes. I'm *very* sorry; Mr. Cuthbert, *awfully sorry!*" began the boy, lifting his dark eyes to the earl's face; "but I've been and broken something that Mrs. Rossiter says you care for more than anything almost. But I always am so dreadfully *unlucky!*" he added, in a sort of parenthesis.

"And what is it you have broken, my man?"

"The bust of your little boy that was in his room upstairs," explained Courcy, though not without a very great effort.

Lord St. Osyth did not speak for the moment, but Courcy's quick eyes noticed the involuntary change that passed over his countenance—the grave look of pain that chased away the pleasant smile of greeting with which he had received him.

"I'm *so* sorry, so *dreadfully* sorry!" exclaimed the child, with a little sob, vexed to the heart to have done anything that could grieve his kind old friend. "I'd rather have smashed my own head," he went on, impulsively, "than have broken that, because you cared so much for it."

"Yes, I *did* care for it, very much indeed," said the earl, speaking slowly and in a low voice; "and I *would* rather you had broken anything else—except, indeed, your own head. If that was the only alternative, I prefer that my bust should have suffered of the two. But don't distress yourself so much, my little fellow," he added, for Courcy had fairly broken down, and was sobbing by this time, in sorrow at having brought that sad look over his friend's kind face. "It was quite an accident on your part, and accidents will happen sometimes. It is only what happened to my hopes long," he murmured, musingly, as if forgetting that he had a listener. "They have been shattered past restoring, it almost seems; so it is as well, perhaps, that I should not have any longer before me that reminder of what once was and what now is. The contrast is too painful. It is best to dwell on it as little as possible; best to cling to the one hope left, that out of the wreck and ruin something may yet be raised up."

"But it can't be mended," said Courcy, sorrowfully, fancying he had caught the other's meaning. "Mrs. Rossiter said so."

"Did she?" absently responded the earl, with a kind of half-audible moan, thinking not of the bust, but of the life which had been cast down, as it were, and was still lying in the mire, all beauty and nobility apparently trodden out of it.

"I'd give the whole world not to have broken it," cried Courcy, fervently. "But there," he added, des-

pairingly, “it’s done now, and I can’t do anything to mend it, and so I’d better be sent home at once, for fear I should break anything more. I’m very sorry—sorry to have made *you* sorry ; ” and the usually bright eyes were soft now with contrition. “ I was enjoying myself so much, too ! But I always *am* such an unlucky fellow, and all the scrapes I get into don’t seem to teach me to keep out of them. So good-bye, Mr. Cuthbert ; I’d better go.”

“ Not so, my boy,” said the earl, rousing himself, and laying his hand kindly on the little fellow’s shoulder. “ Am I to be done out of my promised ramble in the woods in this manner ? Why should *I* be punished because you have had the misfortune to break something I valued ? I think the least you can do, in such a case, is to stay and try to make it up to me,” he went on, playfully. “ Come, cheer up, and try to forget all about it, and I will do the same. You are not the only boy who has got into trouble through carelessness, and I see you are very sorry, my little man ; so we’ll say no more about it. Let us see, in spite of it all, if we cannot manage to have a very happy afternoon.”

Courcy’s dark eyes glanced up gratefully into the earl’s face, and he took his hand as they turned to leave the room in a trustful manner, which showed that he considered the words as a pledge of promise of a full and free forgiveness. For he felt there was no trace of anger or annoyance either on the gentle face or in the quiet accents.

Hand in hand they went out together, and Courcy speedily recovered his spirits under the combined influences of the bright sunshine and his companion's genial manner. He chattered freely as they crossed the park, and when they reached the wood he found it to be indeed a place full of delights—by *day*, at least.

The ground in many places was a soft carpet of moss, whilst the arching boughs overhead formed a canopy of Gothic-like tracery and fretwork, allowing peeps of the blue sky through the lacework formed by the intersecting twigs and branches.

"To see it in all its beauty and glory you should come either in spring or in autumn," said the earl. "A month or two ago it was one sheet of wild flowers, primroses, bluebells, wood-anemones, and violets; and in autumn it is rich in spoils, blackberries, hazel-nuts, beech-nuts, horse-chestnuts, and I don't know what else; whilst it looks as if it were all ablaze when the sun shines upon the red, orange, and golden tints of the leaves. You must come then, and we'll have a nutting expedition, and see if you don't call it a pleasant place; I know I used to think so when I was a boy."

"So do I. It's splendid; and I think it *would* be a pity to burn it down!"

"Oh, oh! I'm glad you've come over to that opinion. But see, there is one of your enemies the wild beasts."

Courcy looked in the direction indicated, and per-

ceived a graceful deer, with his branching horns just visible above the bracken, which grew so tall as half to conceal him.

“What a pretty creature! And see, there are some more of them,” he cried, in delight, as they emerged into an open glade, where a group of them appeared in sight.

“Not very formidable-looking creatures by daylight, are they?” said the earl, with a mischievous smile.

“No, indeed. But things *do* look different in the dark.”

“Very true, my boy; and I am far from meaning to reflect upon your courage. Indeed, I think you showed yourself a very plucky little fellow on the occasion; and this afternoon has proved to me that you have the making of a brave man in you.”

“This afternoon?” echoed Courcy, inquiringly.

“Yes. It must have required a good deal of courage on your part to come so frankly and tell me you had shattered to pieces the thing that of all others I valued in the house. Many a boy would have felt inclined to conceal it, or at least leave me to find it out for myself by chance, trusting that I should not discover the offender. But you would not let yourself flinch; you came boldly to face the enemy, and therefore, my little fellow, I feel you have the true courage—the courage that will not shrink from owning the truth, no matter how disagreeable the consequences may be. Always hold fast to your love

of truth, my child, and never fear what may come of it. *Nothing* that can happen can ever be half so bad as any yielding to falsehood would be."

" You said the other night there were some things a soldier *ought* to fear," cried Courcy, suddenly recollecting how their first conversation had been interrupted at that point. " What things *can* they be ? "

The earl had seated himself on a trunk of a tree lying near—a few having lately been felled in that spot—whilst Courcy had placed himself astride of one opposite him, so that they were sitting face to face. The little boy, however, seemed to be fancying himself on horseback, as he every now and then struck his heels against the sides of the log as if he were pricking his steed with his spurs, whilst he occasionally gave a short word of exhortation to his charger, signifying his desire that he would move a little faster. His progress, though, did not seem in any way affected by it all, his canter being only in his own imagination.

" Ah ! I remember," rejoined Lord St. Osyth. " You thought a soldier shouldn't be afraid of *anything*. But a soldier in the King's army would be afraid, for one thing, of displeasing his King."

" I thought we had a *queen* now ! There's no king, is there ? "

" The king I mean, my boy, is the *King of kings*."

" Oh ! " ejaculated Courcy, with a low prolonged whistle. But a thoughtful look rested on his

face, as if he were beginning to catch the other's meaning.

"Do you not intend to be a soldier in His army?"

"When I'm grown up I mean to be a soldier," answered the boy, rather evasively.

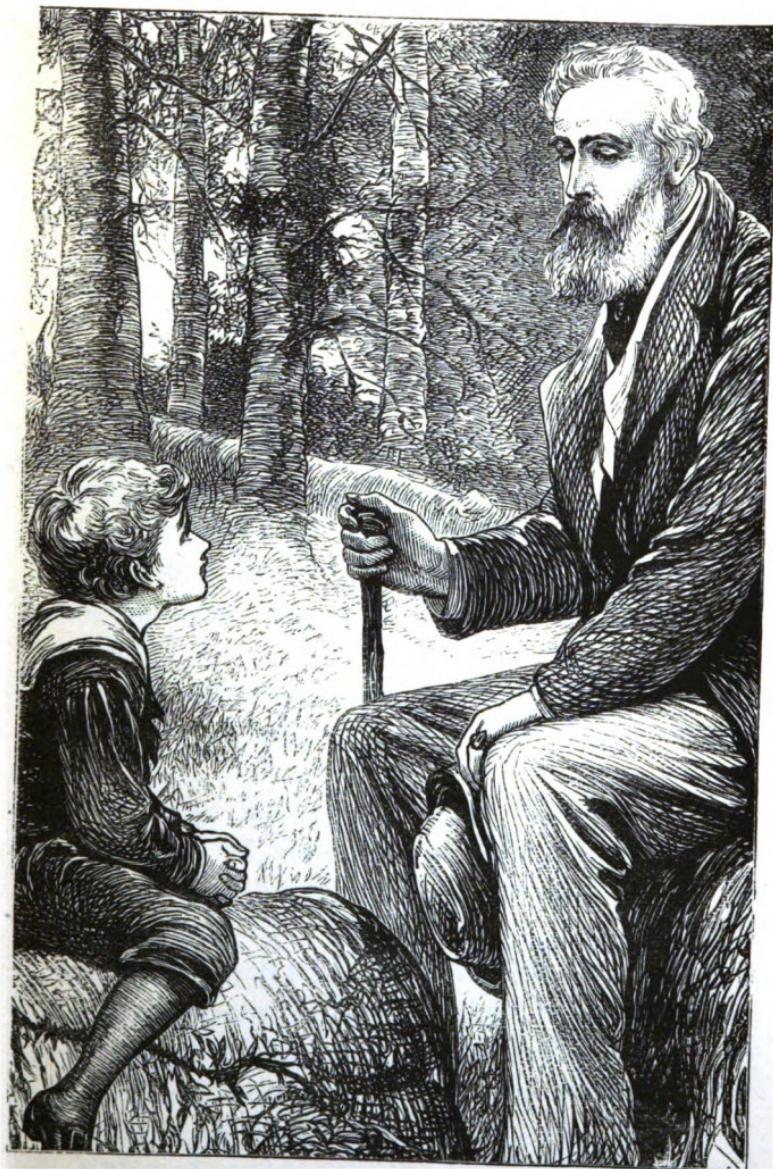
"But you need not wait to be grown up before you belong to the army of which I speak. Very young recruits join the ranks, and the youngest and the feeblest are welcomed. There is many a little child fighting bravely in that vast army."

The earl paused, and Courcy gave his steed another prick with his spurs, accompanied by an energetic "Gee-up!" But his intelligent, earnest little face was wearing an inquiring though half-puzzled expression.

"Do you understand what I mean, my boy? We may all, young or old—you and I side by side—be soldiers of our Heavenly King, and fight to win a crown and a kingdom. It's a better warfare than any earthly strife for glory and renown—strife that brings bloodshed and misery—for this ends in peace and joy."

"But *whom* are we to fight? and *how*?" asked the child.

"Ah! we have plenty of enemies, and we need not go far to find them, though they do sometimes hide themselves in ambush, as it were. They have very ugly names—Lying, Deceit, Pride, Temper, Self-will,



"THE EARL SEATED HIMSELF ON A TRUNK OF A TREE" (p. 115).

Sloth; these are some of them, and there are countless others. But whenever we try not to yield to them we are fighting against them, and a victory over any one of them is better than taking a city. The Bible says so."

"Does it?" asked Courcy, with great interest; "does it, really?"

"Yes; it says—'He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city.' So, my little man, I hope you will begin early to accustom yourself to that sort of fighting. I can speak from experience of the happiness there is in gaining such a victory. But I am an old man, and no doubt the time will soon come for me to lay down my arms. I should like, before I go, to feel I had enlisted one fresh, bright little recruit to strengthen the ranks."

Courcy had changed his position by this time, and had thrown himself down on the turf at his friend's feet.

"Is your little boy fighting too?" he asked, looking up. "I mean, did he fight when he was a little boy? and is he fighting now that he's a big man?"

Lord St. Osyth made no reply. He only passed his hand wearily across his brow and half averted his face. But Courcy's quick eye had caught the look of anguish which crossed the expressive features as that heavy wave of sorrow again swept over them.

"Have I vexed you, Mr. Cuthbert? have I said

anything I oughtn't to ? ” he asked, penitently, peering into the earl's face with an anxious look on his own. “ I don't like to see you look sorry,” he added, with genuine sympathy.

Lord St. Osyth put his hand caressingly on the little fellow's shoulder, and answered him with one of his own peculiarly sweet smiles.

“ Were you thinking of the bust ? ” asked Courcy, suddenly recollecting the late disaster, which had slipped completely out of his mind during the pleasant walk which had been so bright and cheerful.

“ No, my boy,” returned the other gently. “ I said I would try and forget all about it.”

“ But you mightn't be *able* to ! ” suggested Courcy.

“ At all events, I quite forgive you your part in the matter. Don't vex yourself any more over it, my child ; for I like to see this little face looking bright and joyous. It would be very different if you had done anything actually *wrong*—if you had been disobedient or deceitful, then you could never be sorry enough. But this was only carelessness—an accident which, perhaps, was partly my fault, after all, for I ought to have seen that the bracket was more firmly secured. Come,” went on the earl, as he rose from his seat, “ suppose we explore a little farther. You haven't yet seen our little river ; though indeed it is scarcely more than a stream or brook at this point ; but it grows into a river afterwards.”

They crossed the corner of the wood, sometimes hand

in hand, sometimes with Courcy skipping on in front in his eagerness, and then running back to tell of some new discovery he had made, or to display the sprays of wild roses he had succeeded in gathering.

But when they came to the clear stream, flowing along underneath the waving trees, and murmuring among the pebbles in its bed, with beautiful water-lilies lying on its breast, and forget-me-nots nestling among the fringe of rushes and meadow-sweet on either bank, his delight and admiration knew no bounds.

"I never saw such a jolly stream! And there are some fish in it darting about! I can see them quite plainly," he screamed, in his excitement. "Do you ever fish here? May I come and fish here some day? Oh, what splendid fun!" he went on gleefully, as the earl nodded a smiling assent. "And then I'll catch you some fish, and you can have them cooked for your dinner. Don't you think you should rather like to be a fish, Mr. Cuthbert? It must be so very jolly and cool in the water this hot summer day. I do wish I could get in and swim about with them."

"I can't give you up just yet to be a companion to the fishes," laughed the earl. "I want you myself. But one of these days we'll turn out some fishing tackle, and come and sec what sport we can meet with. There are some trout to be caught here, I believe, and we'll see which of us will prove the better angler."

"*You*, of course, for I've never fished in my life yet.

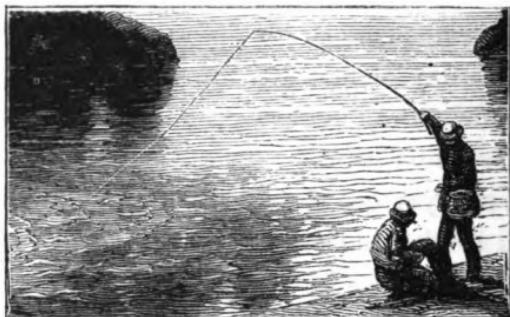
Oh, won't it be grand!" exclaimed Courcy, enthusiastically. When do you think you'll come?"

"Some day soon, if we can."

"I must have a *very strong* fishing-rod," remarked the boy.

"Why?"

"Because if not I shall be *sure* to break it. And I don't want to break any more things."





CHAPTER VIII.

STILTS.

Growing Friendship—A Trying Test of Obedience—A Hard Struggle
—Victory—Courcy on Stilts—Luke Declines a Favour,



COURCY got back to Brerethorpe just after the gong had sounded for dinner, and Colonel and Mrs. Singleton had gone into the dining-room. So he gave Dora the first account of his doings, and all the pleasures and enjoyments he had been having.

"It was so jolly, I did so wish you had been there, Dorey!" he exclaimed; and then he poured out an animated description of all the delights of Maynell Castle and Park.

"And I didn't see the half," he wound up by saying. "I didn't go round the gardens, nor into the hot-houses, nor on to the terrace, nor up into the towers, though Mrs. Rossiter says she will take me there some day. There is such a lot to see, it's too much for one afternoon. But Mr. Cuthbert—Lord St. Osyth, I

mean—said *you* must come some day, Dorey; won't that be jolly!"

But Courcy did not give Dora his full confidence. The account of the great disaster of the day was reserved for his grandparents' ears at dessert.

"I tell you what we shall have to do, Courcy," said the colonel, when the whole had been related. "We shall have to put a label on you to warn people of your propensities. We must put on your back, 'Take care; this fellow breaks everything he touches!'"

"Oh, grandpapa!"

"Well, it wouldn't be far from the truth, it seems to me. Don't I hear of some new breakage nearly every day? Why, you'll be breaking *yourself* next."

"My dear!" remonstrated grandmamma across the table.

"I'm sure I hope he won't," rejoined the colonel, with a shrug of the shoulders, "for he mightn't be easy to mend. At all events, we shouldn't like the process. So, my boy, make up your mind that at least you'll try and keep *yourself* entire."

The intimacy between the castle and the manor increased rapidly. The earl looked in upon them frequently, until Dora grew to be as fond of him as Courcy; for he had a wonderful way of drawing out the love of children, chiefly, no doubt, owing to the large place in his heart he reserved for them. And when Mrs. Singleton had gone over to Maynell to lunch, Dora had gone too, as well as Courcy. The visit had been so full of pleasure

and enjoyment, that the two children were able to talk of little else for a long while afterwards.

"Dorey, Dorey, isn't it jolly!" cried Courcy, eagerly, as he ran into the nursery one morning to deliver himself of a piece of news. "Lord St. Osyth is coming to dinner to-night, and we shall see him, granny says, before dinner as well as at dessert, for he promised to come very early that we might have the half-hour with him before the gong sounds. You must put on Dorey's best blue sash and ribbons, won't you, nurse? and make her hair look lovely," he added quickly, touching with a proud gesture the soft silky golden tresses.

"You may trust me, Master Courcy, to make your sister look as she ought to. The difficulty will be with *you*, for I don't believe I ever made you neat in your life that you didn't go and make yourself in a worse mess than before five minutes afterwards. Times out of number," went on Mrs. Cardle, in aggrieved tones, "have I combed and brushed your hair till it shone again and every hair lay as smooth as a bit of satin, except for the curls, and almost by the time I've turned round, there it has been looking more like a doormat than anything else. I've almost given it up in despair, that I have," she added, with the air of a martyr.

On going in to dessert, the children found the two old soldiers in the midst of a talk over past campaigns in years gone by. Courcy, seated between them, listened eagerly to every word, fixing his dark eyes, with an intent look in them, now on one face, now on the other,

as in turn they related some anecdote, telling of hard fighting, hair-breadth escapes, or noble instances, sometimes of generous self-devotion, sometimes of high courage and daring. His cheek flushed and burnt, whilst his eyes glowed with excitement. He almost forgot to eat his fruit, so completely was he absorbed in following the conversation, which would indeed have been interesting to any one, but was doubly so to a young ardent imagination like his, animated by the true soldier spirit. No wonder, then, that nurse's knock at the door—proclaiming that it was bed-time—was a most unwelcome signal.

"Do let me stop a bit longer, granny," he pleaded, in imploring tones.

There is no saying whether Mrs. Singleton might not have yielded to the earnest request had she been left to herself, but the colonel interposed.

"No, my boy," he said, decidedly; "you know it is contrary to rules, and you should not have asked. We said you were *always* to go directly nurse knocked at the door for you; and, if anything, she is a little behind her time to-night. So not another word, Courcy. Prompt obedience is the rule of the army, you know."

The words were spoken in the colonel's usual manner—firmly, but kindly; and rarely before had the boy shown any disposition to rebel, however hard it might be to obey. Perhaps, though, he had never been put to quite so severe a test; besides, this evening he was a little over-excited, and it was just as he was in the midst



"HE GAVE DORA THE FIRST ACCOUNT OF HIS DOINGS" (p. 123).

of listening to a thrilling story from the earl—and few could relate a story as *he* could—that the summons had come.

Courcy knew quite well, in calm moments, that whenever his grandpapa once said a thing he always kept to it, and that it was useless to try to alter his decision. But he was scarcely himself just now; his whole heart and soul were with the soldier of whose brave doings and terrible sufferings he was hearing.

“Do let me stop, grandpapa, just a minute,” he urged, disregarding the prohibition to repeat the request.

“No, my boy. Say ‘Good night’ at once, and go.”

But Courcy made no movement to obey. His eyes filled with hot tears, and a passionate flush dyed his cheeks, as instead of promptly getting down from his seat and running round to kiss his grandmamma, according to custom, he remained sitting motionless, with a look creeping over his face that told of the rebellious feelings within. And when little Dora, seeing how matters stood, came round and laid her hand on his arm with a persuasive gesture, as if to coax him to be good and come with her, he shook it off impatiently.

Was he going to yield to a fit of naughtiness? Granny seemed apprehensive of it, as she glanced at him anxiously across the table, as though fearful of a scene. She was sympathising with the child in his disappointment, but felt bound to agree with her husband in his decision.

At that moment, and just as Colonel Singleton said,

gravely, “Courcy, did you hear me ?” the earl bent forward and whispered something in a low tone in the boy’s ear. The cloud which had gathered over the usually bright little face cleared off : he raised his glistening eyes to his kind old friend’s face, whilst an answering smile crept into his own ; and getting down from his chair he went round without any more hesitation to give his nightly greeting.

Lord St. Osyth had said, “Now is the time for fighting the enemy, my boy. Don’t yield and let him get the victory, but show a bold front, and trample him down under your feet !” And Courcy, understanding the allusion to their conversation in the wood, which he had since pondered over more than once, like a brave little soldier buckled on his armour, and gulping down his disappointment, as well as the rising tears, went round as cheerfully as he could to say “Good night.”

Granny’s kiss was very warm and loving ; the earl patted him on the head, saying, “My brave little man !” whilst the colonel, putting his hand under his chin, gazed into the little upturned face with an approving look, and then printed a kiss upon his forehead, saying, “I thought you wouldn’t disappoint me, Courcy. It was very hard, I know, my boy, but very likely you’ll thank me for it some day.”

And as he reached the door, Lord St. Osyth called out, “I think, Courcy, I shall keep grandpapa waiting for the rest of the story until I can tell it to you as well. At any rate, you sha’n’t lose it.”

So, instead of an outbreak of self-will and naughtiness, which would have ended in unhappiness, have made everyone uncomfortable, and himself miserable as well as granny, by thus controlling and conquering himself all went off pleasantly, and he was able to go upstairs hand in hand with Dora, talking gaily, and discussing the stories to which they had been listening. Whilst—though he knew nothing of that—the moment the door had closed behind him the earl remarked—

“ You may well be proud of your grandson, Singleton. He is the finest little fellow I have seen for a long time. It was a sharp struggle for him, poor little man ; but he gained the victory and came off with flying colours. He has the making of a splendid soldier in him ; but I see he owes a good deal to your wise discipline.”

“ Nay, it’s granny to whom he owes the most. She comes in sometimes, with her woman’s tact, and softens down what might turn to harshness if left to itself, perhaps.”

The following day Mrs. Singleton took Courcy with her into Horton, as she wanted to have him measured for a new suit of clothes. He had not been there since the afternoon when he had seen the performing monkey ; but his grandmamma was not much afraid of his running off after monkeys again. It had led him into such difficulties on the last occasion that he was not likely to repeat such a thing in a hurry.

Still, she was rather fearful lest they might meet

anything that could put dangerous ideas and desires into his head, and consequently she felt rather relieved, on entering the last shop at which they had to make purchases, to think that so far all had gone off well. But just as they emerged from the shop, a boy walking on stilts passed along on the opposite side of the road. Courcy, forgetful of everything else, stood looking eagerly after him until he was out of sight; though his grandmamma had by this time taken her seat in the carriage, and was calling to him to do the same. She felt a grim foreboding that she should hear of those stilts again, and devoutly wished some fortunate accident had detained them in the shop until the owner of them had passed safely by.

Her fears were realised. Courcy seemed able to think and talk of nothing but stilts all the way home and all the rest of the evening.

"I *should* so like a pair, grandpapa," he said, in coaxing tones, at dessert. "It would be such fun to go about feeling myself as tall as you. Do say I may have some; please do."

Mrs. Singleton was inclined to oppose the idea; but the colonel seemed to see no reason for not gratifying his little grandson's request, and smilingly allowed himself to be persuaded into promising to order a pair for him at the village carpenter's.

"The child must have some amusement, and that is as harmless as any," he remarked, as soon as the little people were gone off to bed.

"But I must say I wish you hadn't consented," returned Mrs. Singleton. "He'll get no end of tumbles, I expect, and hurt himself seriously perhaps."

"Nonsense, my dear ; a few tumbles don't do a boy any harm ; knocks and bruises come naturally to them ; they'd scarcely feel quite the thing without them. Why, when I was a boy I was generally so covered with bruises that I was nearly black and blue all over, till I believe there was hardly a square inch of skin of the natural colour on my whole body."

"I am glad you don't feel constrained to present the same appearance now," laughed Mrs. Singleton ; "and pray don't instil into Courcy's mind a wish to be similarly disfigured ; for he is quite bad enough already."

The colonel promised he would try not to increase her anxieties by any indiscretion on his part.

Courcy got the stilts—not very high ones—and could do nothing all the first day but practise walking upon them, to the utter distraction of Luke, who was mowing the lawn, which the little boy at the same time chose to make his exercise-ground, from the feeling, no doubt, that if he should get a few tumbles the soft turf would be preferable to the gravel walks.

But if Luke had to leave his work once to assist him on to his stilts and give him a start, he had to do so twenty times, until it seemed almost a farce his pretending to be mowing at all.

"How be I to get through my work if I'm to be

doing nothing but a-setting you up on them there sticks every minute, I should like to know?" he exclaimed, at length, in a sort of despair.

"Never mind the lawn," returned Courcy, who, after staggering a step or two forward, had again come to grief. "Just help me once more, and then I'll help you mow in return, if you like."

"A pretty job *you'd* make of it!" grunted Luke, with no small amount of scorn in his 'gruff tones. "Mowing ain't so easy as all that. It wants a deal of practice, like most other things."

"I'm sure it wants practice to walk on stilts," sighed Courcy, overbalancing himself, and jumping down to avoid falling prostrate at Luke's feet. "I'd no idea it was so difficult. That fellow the other day walked along as easy as possible. Just help me up again, Luke. I daresay I shall get on better this time."

Luke, with infinite patience, again came to his assistance.

"Suppose *you* have a try, Luke," suggested the little boy, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. "I should like to see how you would look on stilts."

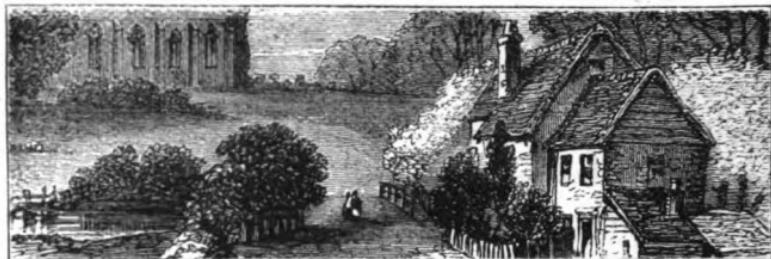
"Not if I knows it, Master Courcy," returned Luke, with a promptitude rare with him, at the same time declining, with a shake of his head, the proffered stilts. "You don't think I would go making such a silly of myself, do you? Why, I should look like a great scarecrow, and no mistake, stuck up on them things."

"So you would," assented Courcy, with more truth

than politeness. " You'd do beautifully to frighten away the birds, wouldn't you ? " And he laughed so merrily at the idea that he tumbled off his stilts once more.

However, not being at all a clumsy little fellow, he soon became more expert, and by the next day was able to walk quite easily without any assistance. It was a delightful novelty, and entirely engrossed him for the present. Whenever grandmamma looked out of window, she was pretty sure to see the little figure walking up and down, or round and round, with Dora following, looking on in respectful admiration of his skill, but altogether declining to attempt such a thing herself.





CHAPTER IX.

MRS. CARDLE'S COUNTERPART.

Courcy Personates his Nurse by the help of the Stilts—In that Character Pays a Visit—Hears Samuel's Opinions—Meets and Deceives the Rector—Meets Nurse Herself—Her Wrath—Courcy gets off again.



N going up to the nursery one day when the dinner-gong had sounded, and Colonel and Mrs. Singleton had proceeded to the dining-room, Courcy and Dora found the room deserted, nurse having been called down to speak to a brother who had come to pay her an hour's visit on his way

through Brerethorpe. As the evening was warm, Mrs. Singleton had given the young people permission to run

out of doors again ; so Dora had come up to fetch her hat, and Courey had come with her.

Lying on the bed, where she had hastily thrown them down, were Mrs. Cardle's bonnet and cloak, the latter a long grey waterproof, which she had been wearing that afternoon, as the weather was dull and threatening to be showery. The sight of these things seemed to cause some sudden idea to flash into Courey's mind. His eyes kindled with a mirthful gleam, which in his case always meant mischief.

"Dorey, we'll have some fun. I'll put on nurse's things and pretend I'm Mrs. Cardle, for when I'm on my stilts I'm very nearly the same height. I measured myself against her this afternoon, when she came out to call us in to tea. So I shall look just like her, and this long cloak will hide the stilts. And I'll go to old Samuel, and ask him how his rheumatism is, like nurse does, and see if he'll find me out. I don't believe he will, because he can't see very well, you know. Won't it be a joke ? Be quick, Dorey, and help me on with these things before she comes up."

Dora assisted in putting the cloak round his shoulders, but it trailed considerably on the ground, and when the bonnet—a black one with a bunch of yellow roses at one side, and a wreath of them forming the cap—was set on the top of his curly head, he looked as funny a little object, and as unlike the portly figure he intended to personate, as he well could.

" You won't do at all like that," laughed Dora.

" Nobody will take you for nurse. You are not half nor quarter stout enough, for one thing ; and then your face is so *very* different."

It was indeed. Such a little laughing, roguish countenance certainly did not belong to the grave Mrs. Cardle, who often wore a depressed air, caused, as a rule, by the discovery of some new piece of mischief on the part of Courcy.

" I can soon make myself stout," he rejoined ; " I've only to put on that great shawl of nurse's, and tie it round and round me under the cloak, and then I'm sure I shall look just as big as she is. Make haste, Dorey. What a time you are tying it ! "

And no wonder, as she was laughing so immoderately at the comical figure presented by her brother that she could scarcely give him any assistance at all. And as he caught sight of himself in the glass, he could not refrain from a burst of merriment. For a few moment's business had to be suspended, as they both went off into such uncontrollable fits of laughter, that they were rendered quite helpless for the time being. Each glance of Dora's at Courcy, or each glimpse he got of himself in the looking-glass, was the signal for a fresh outburst ; whilst such merry laughter alone in itself was infectious.

At length, however, Courcy, impressed with the necessity for haste, once more called his sister to his aid.

" You must help me put on a veil, like nurse often

does; for I must cover up my face, or they'll know me in a minute."

The only veil forthcoming was a thick Shetland one—not quite what one would have chosen for a warm June evening, but just the thing in Courcy's eyes, as it concealed him more effectually than a thinner one would have done.

"There! nobody will be able to see me through that!" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "Now, Dorey, come along." And gathering his trailing garments in his arms, he ran down the stairs and out through the open drawing-room window on to the lawn, followed by his sister.

He soon mounted upon his stilts; and though he looked rather lanky about the skirts when compared with the upper portion of his body, he did not trouble about that, but taking the path through the shrubbery, made for a little side gate, and passed out through it.

"You stay there, Dorey; for if you came you'd make me laugh so that I shouldn't be able to speak. I'll come back and tell you all about it."

The little girl, knowing she would get into disgrace with nurse if she went beyond bounds, contented herself with remaining where she was, watching the grotesque-looking figure until it disappeared from view.

Courcy had not far to go before he reached the cottage for which he was bound. The old man was

sitting alone, his daughter having gone down to the village on some errand.

"Good evening, Samuel," began the boy, imitating nurse's tones and form of address as closely as he could. "I've just dropped in for a minute to ask how you find yourself this evening."

"Very good of you, I'm sure, ma'am. It's Mrs. Cardle, ain't it?" responded the old man, whose sight was getting too dim to be able to pierce through a thick veil, but who could make out a familiar bonnet and cloak, and did not stop to examine the figure too critically. "Won't you sit down, ma'am, for a minute?" he added, for he dearly liked a little bit of gossip.

"No, thank you," replied Courcy, with a slight tremble in his voice, caused by suppressed laughter, as he reflected that his only safety was in keeping an erect posture. "I came to know how the rheumatics were."

"Not much," replied the old man, in his peculiar phraseology. "I beant much to boast of, spite o' the fine weather. I feels I'm a getting old, that's the fact; but there, we can't expect to be allus young, can us, Mrs. Cardle? I daresay, now, *you* begin to feel not quite so spry as you once did."

An indefinable sound, something like a grunt—which might have meant anything, but was really a rising laugh being choked down—was Courcy's only response.

He had not thought it prudent to advance farther than the doorway, where he had remained standing all this time, and now he prepared to bid a hasty adieu, and take himself off whilst still undetected. So after another word or two he bade the old man "Good night" and departed, leaving the other in no small degree mystified by the strangeness of Mrs. Cardle's manner this evening.

"She wasn't herself nohow," he said to his daughter, on her return. "Maybe she'd got a cold, for her voice was different somehow; or maybe she was low, like we all get sometimes; but, at any rate, she didn't give me a chance to praise up the broth she brought me t'other day, like I meant to do next time I see'd her. I don't say as I shouldn't have liked a drop more of it if she'd have axed me. But there, she was in such a mighty hurry, I couldn't nohow get in a word," added the old man, rather testily.

Instead of returning by the way he came, Courcy chose the longer road leading past the rectory. Just as he drew near the gate of the garden lying in front of the house, he met the rector himself.

The evening, as we have said, was a dull one, and therefore darker than usual, whilst the road at that point was so thickly overshadowed by trees that but comparatively little light could pierce through. Meeting thus in a sort of twilight, it was not very surprising that the rector's short-sighted eyes did not see through the disguise, but recognising Mrs. Cardle's

bonnet (for those yellow roses were known pretty well in the village by this time), naturally concluded it was that worthy woman herself who was coming towards him. It is true, he had a sort of vague impression that her general appearance was rather strange, but not being an observant man, he did not perceive to what that was owing.

To Courcy's delight, he greeted him with an affable "Good evening, Mrs. Cardle"—for the rector liked to be courteous and friendly to all his parishioners.

"Good evening, sir," responded the little pretender to the name of Cardle, in tones so closely imitating those of the individual he was personating, that it was not much wonder the unsuspecting rector did not notice the difference.

"Your young charges are safely in bed by this time, I suppose," he pursued, by way of saying something. "And I daresay you are not sorry, for that little Master Courcy of yours seems a high spirited young fellow, and I expect you have your hands pretty full of him, except when he is sound asleep."

"You may well say so, sir. He's the most troublesome boy I ever came across—enough to worrit the very life out of me," replied Courcy, repeating expressions he had heard fall from nurse's own lips, but at the same time rather overdoing his part, as she would not herself have used such strong terms in speaking of him to the clergyman. They were reserved mostly for his own ears, at times when milder forms of speech seemed to make no impression.

The rector seemed rather surprised at her warmth, but as they were not exactly on confidential terms he only rejoined, "Ah, well! boys will be boys; and we can't put old heads upon young shoulders, as people say. I don't dislike a spice of mischief in a boy myself; but I daresay I should feel very differently if I had the charge of him, as you have of Master Courcy. Tell him I hope he will soon mend his ways." And with a pleasant "good night" to the supposed Mrs. Cardle, the rector turned in at his own gates.

Courcy pursued his way, inwardly chuckling to himself with amusement, and longing to indulge in a good hearty roar at the rector's expense. But he kept it in for the present, lest it should betray him.

He was longing, though, to have it all out with Dora, in some safe place well out of hearing; and was eagerly stalking along up the carriage drive, intending to go in search of her, when at a bend in the road he suddenly became aware of approaching figures. To his dismay, they proved those of nurse and her brother, whom she was accompanying as far as the gate for a last farewell. It was too late to beat a retreat, for they were already almost face to face. Besides, it was not in Courcy's nature to "sneak away," as he would have said. So there was nothing for him but to stand and brave it out.

Mrs. Cardle's countenance presented for the moment a ludicrous picture of utter surprise and perplexity. Surely that was *her* bonnet on the head of the tall, odd-

looking figure before her ! and the cloak, too, was certainly the one she had left lying on her bed upstairs less than an hour ago ! It was impossible that any one else should have the very exact counterpart of those two articles of dress. But then who could this bulky-looking individual be ? for it was a figure she had never seen before. The apparition was so mysterious and so inexplicable, that for a second or two she stood motionless from surprise.

But soon her eye, which had first been arrested by the bonnet, travelling downwards in its survey, noted the odd appearance of the lower limbs, and in a moment the whole thing dawned upon her.

"My word !" she exclaimed ; "I do declare if that isn't Master Courcy on his stilts, and dressed up in my clothes ! Well, I never ! if that isn't haudacious, I don't know what is ! And he's actually been out walking in 'em, too, and maybe folks thought it was me ! "

As she spoke she drew aside the folds of the cloak, revealing in all their nakedness the stilts which it had concealed.

The boy jumped down and stood upon his own feet, feeling he was "in for it," as he mentally phrased it ; whilst Mrs. Cardle pulled off the veil, thus displaying the mischievous little face, which looked so droll in its unwonted head-gear.

Nurse's companion, highly amused at the scene, went off into a hearty fit of laughter, which he seemed to be unable to control, much to the indignation of his sister.

"How can you be so foolish, John, laughing like that, and encouraging the boy when he ought to be made ashamed of himself?" she exclaimed, with some asperity in her tones. "For my part, I can't see what you find to laugh at; but if you go on like that, the child will think he has been doing something quite fine and clever."

And, indeed, Courcy's dark eyes, which were fixed upon the face of the offending brother, had a responsive twinkle of merriment in them, showing that he would have enjoyed joining in the laugh had he dared. He was by no means subdued to penitence yet, but rather appeared to be enjoying the joke, and thinking more of the fun he had been having than of his present predicament. His unconcern was rather irritating to Mrs Cardle.

"Do you call this a thing for a young *gentleman* to do?" she began, indignantly; "putting on his nurse's clothes and going about the village in them. I wonder you could have had the face to do it, that I do! letting alone the being so bold as to take such liberties. But there—here's your grandpapa and grandmamma coming along; let us hear what they will say to it."

Courcy looked round, and found that Colonel and Mrs. Singleton were advancing towards them, followed by Dora. The closeness of the evening had caused them to leave the dining-room earlier than usual, and step out at once upon the lawn in hopes of getting a little air, whilst Mrs. Singleton had brought the children's dessert

out to them there. But they only found Dora, and were asking for Courey when the sound of voices in the drive drew them in that direction.

As they appeared upon the scene, nurse's brother shrank into the background, and stood waiting somewhat awkwardly at a little distance.

The colonel could scarcely control his features sufficiently to assume the look of gravity he felt was expected from him, as he listened to nurse's tale of the little boy's delinquencies.

For it was enough to provoke a smile to see the little cloaked and bonneted figure standing in its trailing garments, the roguish face crowned with a wreath of yellow roses, which lay down flat on the top of the forehead, concealing nearly all the hair.

An artist might well have made a sketch of the scene, and have called his picture "Caught!" for that word better than any other conveys an idea of the little fellow's whole air and expression as he stood there, thus suddenly stopped in the full flow of his fun and mischief, awaiting sentence from his elders, and conscious that nurse, at least, viewed his proceedings with unqualified displeasure; and yet, as the remembrance of his interview with old Samuel, and, above all, with the rector, came across his mind, he could scarcely refrain from a burst of merry laughter, even at that critical moment.

After hearing what nurse had to say, the colonel turned to the boy, and made him confess where he had been and what he had been doing. Perhaps Dora was

not the only listener who felt inclined to laugh over the recital ; but, however that might be, the colonel felt bound to administer some sort of rebuke, and wound up by saying—

“ I don’t like practical jokes, my boy. You can have plenty of fun without that sort of thing, and you certainly had no business to make free with nurse’s things in this fashion.”

“ It was a great liberty, and you mustn’t do it again, dear,” said Mrs. Singleton. “ I daresay nurse will forgive you this time, if you ask her pardon, as you didn’t *mean* any harm by it ; but remember, you are not to do it again.”





CHAPTER X.

THE HAY-FIELD.

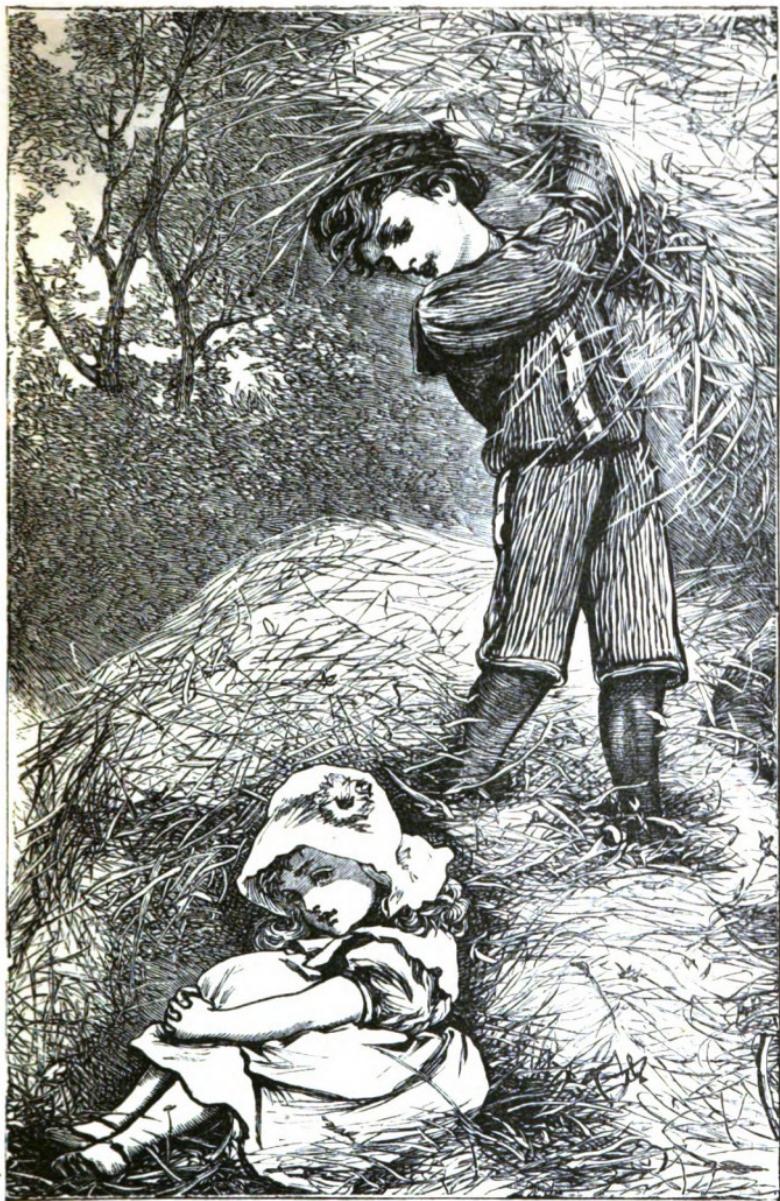
Haymaking at the Manor—The Grandmother's Anxiety—Colonel Singleton Visits the Field—The Hush of Dread—An Accident to Courcy.



THE haymaking had begun, and indeed in many fields the hay had already been carried. But the large meadow which lay nearest to the house was one of the last to be cut.

The sweet fragrance of the newly-mown grass borne

on the summer breeze came in at the open windows of the Manor in delicious whiffs of scent-laden air, suggesting—to one of the inmates at least—all the delights of the hay-field—the tumbling about in the sun-dried grass, the clambering upon the haycocks, the being buried under the hay, and then suddenly rising out of the make-believe grave, the flinging it at one another, or when tired of playing and laughing, the lying on



"BEING BURIED UNDER THE HAY" (p. 148).

a soft bed made of it, gazing up at the blue sky overhead, and listening to the singing of the birds, or trying to follow with the eye the upward flight of the lark—all these things both Courcy and Dora found very delightful, as children generally do; and they would have liked to have almost lived out in the hay-field.

Nearly the whole morning had been spent there; and as soon as luncheon was over, Courcy petitioned to be allowed to return. Mrs. Singleton, however, hesitated about granting his request. It was much too hot for Dora to go out to play in the sun; besides which, nurse, she knew, had some work to finish which would keep her indoors; so that if he went he must go alone.

"I'll promise not to go out of the field, granny," he pleaded.

"And the men will look after him," remarked the colonel. "Besides, what harm can come to him there? It is as safe a place as could well be found, with no perilous trees in it to climb or wood to get lost in."

"I suppose I must say 'Yes,' then," rejoined Mrs. Singleton, with a secret reluctance for which she could scarcely account.

But as there seemed no reasonable grounds for denying the child's request, and his eager little face showed how much he was longing to be off again, she gave the desired permission, though she wished to recall it the moment it had been given.

Courcy, however, did not wait for anything more.

Consent having been granted, he bounded away with a gay hurrah, which ended in a shout of glee, as with life and strength in every limb, giving grace to every motion, he ran off, taking flying leaps, in the exuberance of his spirits, over such of the low shrubs or flower-beds on the lawn as came in his way.

They stood watching him; and just before he passed out of sight he turned to look back. Perceiving them, he took off his cap with a grand flourish, and waved it in the air as a parting salute. Then, with another joyous shout, he cleared at a bound the low sunk fence that skirted the lawn, and a moment after disappeared from view.

As on the afternoon when our story began, Colonel Singleton threw himself into an easy-chair near the drawing-room window, and took up a newspaper; whilst Mrs. Singleton, seated near, plied her knitting-needles, a certain air of preoccupation resting on her usually placid face. She seemed as if she were waiting and listening there for something that was to come.

After sitting for awhile in silence, either contemplating the scene before her or engrossed with her own thoughts, Mrs. Singleton broke the stillness by saying aloud, "I wonder what that child is doing all this time! I hope he isn't coming to any harm."

The colonel, who had just finished his paper, laid it aside as she spoke.

"He is having some fine fun, depend upon it. There is nothing like a hay-field to a child. It almost

makes me wish to be young again, that I might enjoy its delights as I did when a boy ; ” and Colonel Singleton drew a long breath, as if to inhale the whiff of sweet-scented air which came in at the window. “ But if it will make you any happier,” he pursued, “ to know how the boy is getting on, I don’t mind taking a stroll down there and seeing what he is about.”

“ Do, dear, for I am afraid he may be over-heating himself ; and if you can bring him away with you, all the better.”

The colonel went, nothing loth, if the truth were told, to take a peep at the pretty animated scene of busy labour which the long meadow presented ; and looking out, as he drew near, for a welcome from a bright young face and an active little form, which he knew would bound to meet him as soon as it should catch sight of him.

He paused for a moment at the gate, and took a look round the field. He expected by this time to see the boy rushing towards him, for he knew his quick eyes would soon spy him out. How was it, then, that he did not come ? Where could he be ?

The colonel advanced farther into the field, and took a more searching glance around. A strange sort of hush seemed to prevail—an unwonted stillness, in which there was something oppressive. He had come expecting to hear the merry laugh he knew so well echoing over the field ; but instead of that, a dead silence had fallen upon the scene. The very labourers

seemed under the spell, as they paused in their work, with fork or scythe in hand, and glanced furtively towards him.

What was the meaning of it? and where was the boy? Was he hiding in some nook or corner for mischief? Was he buried underneath a heap of hay, intending suddenly to spring up with a shout and startle his old grandfather? "More than likely," the colonel said to himself; and yet, somehow, he felt uneasy at not seeing him.

Where was he? Surely he had not left the field after having promised his grandmamma not to do so. He had never known him break a promise before; if he had done so now, then all the trust and confidence they had placed in his word would be shaken. The very idea was pain to the high-minded soldier, who longed that his grandson should be true and honourable as the day. But he hastened to cast aside the thought, half indignant with himself for the suspicion. "At least, I will not doubt him until the thing is plainly proved," he said to himself. Still, he wondered why the men looked so oddly at him. "The young rogue has been plotting some mischief with them, I'll be bound. Saw me coming, I daresay, and got them to help him hide."

Going towards a knot of two or three who were standing not far off, he asked if they knew where Master Courcy was.

The men touched their caps respectfully; but that

was all. They seemed to be smitten with sudden dumbness, and only glanced at him uneasily.

"He has been here, hasn't he? Has he left the field?"

"Ay, sir!" at last one of the men summoned up courage to reply. "He's been took home," he added, abruptly, without further explanation.

"Taken home!" echoed the colonel. "But why?"

"Then you don't know nothing yet, sir?" questioned the other, his manner expressing a sort of desperation at having been forced into the position of spokesman; "you ain't heard aught about it?"

"About what?" sharply demanded the colonel.

"The accident, sir; there's been an accident," murmured the labourer, in a sort of hushed voice, something like the subdued tones in which people speak in a house whence a life has just departed.

"An accident!" repeated Colonel Singleton, conscious of a sudden contraction of the heart. "An accident to my little grandson!" he gasped, in a hoarse voice.

"Ay, sir; and they've a-took him home round that way," explained the other, with a jerk of his head signifying that the road leading round to the back of the house had been chosen.

Without another word, the colonel turned and walked rapidly in the direction intimated, with a terrible agonising fear tugging at his heart. He had not stayed to learn *what* the accident had been; but

he knew, by the honest sympathy expressed on the rugged countenances of the little knot of haymakers, that it must be something serious. Oh, if it should prove to be fatal!

As he drew near the house—and his rapid strides brought him to it in a few minutes—the dread of what might be awaiting him there made him slacken his pace for an instant. But the thought of his wife, left thus by a strange mischance to bear the first stroke of the blow alone, again urged him on. "This was no moment," he told himself, "for considering his own feelings and yielding to a selfish shrinking from the unknown trouble he was going in to meet. He must help her to bear whatever might lay before them."

So he walked steadily forward.





CHAPTER XI.

EVENTS IN THE LONG MEADOW.

How it Happened—A Terrible Fall—The Poor Grandmother—The Colonel goes for the Doctor—A Wretched Afternoon.



WE must go back and explain in a few words what had been happening in the long meadow on this lovely summer's afternoon.

Courey, in great force and spirits, as we have seen, had joyously made his way to the hay-field, promising himself an afternoon of great enjoyment, and only wishing that Dora was with him.

For a time all went well. He chattered to the haymakers, and even joined their ranks, taking up a spare fork and setting to work in earnest, turning over the half-dried grass as he saw

them doing. But after a while something else engrossed his attention, and the fork was thrown aside. For a waggon was brought into the field, and some of the men began loading it with the hay that was ready to be carried. Courcy stood by, looking on with the keen interest he always threw into everything, until higher and higher grew the heaped-up fragrant load.

The word for starting was just about to be given, when Courcy, boy-like, bethought himself what glorious fun it would be to have a ride on the top of the piled-up hay.

"Let me get up there; do help me up!" he cried, capering round in his excitement and glee. "Just lift me up, somebody, and I'll ride down to the farm. No—I forgot," he added, his eager face clouding a little; "I musn't go out of the field, because I promised I wouldn't; but I can ride as far as the gate, and that's better than nothing."

The men hesitated for a moment—not that they saw any danger in the thing, for their own lads had done it often enough; but they had a feeling that somehow the young Master Courcy was different from their own boys. They had an instinctive sense of the exceeding preciousness of this bright young life, and could form some notion of what he must be to the grandfather and grandmother; not to speak of the absent father, the brave captain, whom many of them had watched grow up from a boy before their eyes. This spirited, handsome little fellow, with his winning ways and love of fun and daring,

"UPSET HIS BALANCE" (p. 161).



was felt by the roughest among them to be cast in a finer mould than most ; it was no ordinary bit of common earthenware, but a piece of porcelain, more costly, and therefore to be more tenderly handled. “ For you wouldn’t easily find his like again,” one of them had said that morning. And he who had said it was one who loved, with no lack of honest warmth, his own hardy lads at home. Therefore they hesitated.

But Courcy’s coaxings soon overcame their half-formed scruples, and between them they hoisted him up carefully into the elevated position it was his ambition to attain. As soon as he was safely seated beside one of the men, the word was given and the horses stepped forward.

But just at that moment Courcy made a sudden motion, which, joined to the movement of the waggon, upset his balance. A little sharp scream, a cold thrill which ran through the bystanders, who vainly stretched up their hands to save him, and the bright boy was lying a little senseless heap at their feet.

A low murmur of consternation ran round the little group, as they stood as if paralysed, looking down in speechless dismay upon the prostrate form, which lay as if all life had been struck out of it in that one terrible moment.

Rough sunburnt labourers, who had known hard struggles with grinding poverty, had passed through trouble after trouble, had even, some of them, stood face to face with death, shivered each one as if a son of his

own lay there, and through eyes dimmed by a mist that seldom rose in them, they gazed in mute dismay at the motionless little form before them. If it would only move hand or foot they felt it would be an unutterable relief.

Then, gently and tenderly—very gently and tenderly for such strong rough men—they lifted him up and bore him along between them. Scarcely a word broke the sad silence. By common consent they took the path leading round to the back of the house, in order to avoid being seen from the front windows; and they trod as lightly and quietly as they could, not to attract attention. They felt what a shock it would be to either the colonel or Mrs. Singleton to come suddenly upon them, bearing what looked so like a lifeless form.

But they were not to accomplish their purpose. Before they could reach the door Mrs. Singleton, who happened at that moment to be standing looking out through a side window, caught a glimpse of the moving figures. Some instinct seemed to tell her what it all meant; and, throwing open the window, she beckoned to them to come nearer.

They made a halt, but hesitated to approach, until Mrs. Singleton, stepping out through the open bay window, advanced a few paces towards them. Then they had no choice left; they slowly drew near with their insensible burden.

What she had so often dreaded had come at last! It almost seemed as if she had known it was coming, and

had been waiting for it, so calmly she received it. She made no cry ; she asked no questions—perhaps because her lips almost refused to move ; only the colour all forsook her face, upon which some new lines of pain suddenly printed themselves.

Quietly, as if half stunned or in a dream, she said, “Bring him in here.” And turning, she led the way through the open window into the room within. It was a spare bed-room, one of a suite of apartments—sitting, bed, dressing, and bath rooms—which opened out of one another, and which, being on the ground floor, was generally appropriated to guests.

She led the way and they followed, and in silence laid the little insensible form down upon the bed. For one moment she stood with clasped hands, apparently forgetful of the men’s presence, as she gazed with a look of anguish upon the little face which was still and pale as death.

Then turning round, still with that forced calmness which often covers over such bitter pain and heart-ache, she said, “Will one of you make haste round to the stables, and tell the groom to ride off for the doctor without losing a moment ?”

The men touched their caps, and went out, as they had come in, silently and noiselessly, their manner showing a mute respectful sympathy ; and she was left alone with the child. Could that be her bright, restless, high-spirited little Courcy lying there ? Was it possible that he could have been stricken down thus in a moment ? It

would have been a relief if she could have given way to the agony of feeling that swept over her, as she realised what it would be should they be called to part from their little treasure. In that moment she went through all the pain of such a separation.

But this was no time for any indulgence of feeling. She must brace herself up for what lay before her ; she must put herself entirely out of sight, and only think of what there was to be done. Such remedies and restoratives as they could use on their own responsibility must be applied at once, without loss of time. So she rang the bell for nurse.

The latter received no slight shock as her eyes fell upon the little prostrate, motionless figure ; but her mistress's calmness awed her into self-control, and quietly and noiselessly they moved about, doing all that could be done.

Then came a step in the corridor outside, a step so familiar in Mrs. Singleton's ears that she would have known it among a thousand. It paused upon the threshold ; but she had advanced by that time to the door, which she opened, still in that unnaturally calm, quiet manner, and then stood face to face with her husband. They looked into each other's eyes ; then his turned to the bed, and afterwards sought her face again.

"Life is not gone," she whispered ; and that was all the comfort she could give. She did not know how long she might be able to say even that much, for all

their efforts had failed to draw forth any sign of returning consciousness. "I have sent James for the doctor," she added.

"Hadn't I better go myself?" promptly rejoined the colonel. "Dr. Hargood might be out, and James might content himself by leaving a message, and never think of calling in any one else. I will go and bring back *some one* with me. Or shall I stay with you, and send another messenger?" he added, as he glanced at his wife's pale, anxious face.

"No, no; go yourself—there would be much more satisfaction in that."

So she sent him from her, knowing what a comfort in times of trouble like this it is to be doing something, no matter what, but just to be *doing*. Anything is easier than to sit inactive, unable to help, only watching and waiting, with that miserable feeling of utter helplessness lying like a leaden weight upon the spirit. She was thankful as she took her seat beside the bed, and waited in the intense stillness of that silent darkened chamber, with thoughts and fears thronging so tumultuously through her brain that she seemed to have already lived through days and years, instead of an hour or two—she felt thankful that her husband was spared this, that he should have that other task. She was willing the harder one should fall to her share.

Thus she waited, in almost breathless suspense and intensest longing, watching for the first faint sign of

returning consciousness ; her eyes fastened with an intent gaze upon the little pallid countenance which lay in that death-like sleep. They had done all they could ; they must await now, with what patience they could muster, the doctor's coming ; and Mrs. Singleton strained her ears to listen for the first sound of horse's hoofs. And yet she knew it was not possible he could arrive yet.

Nurse had left the room to go up-stairs and arrange who should take her place in the nursery with Dora whilst she was occupied down-stairs. She tried not to alarm the child ; but the tears would come, as she told how Courcy had been hurt somehow in the hay-field, and though they *hoped* he would soon be better, he must be kept very quiet, and Dora must be very good, and remain contentedly in the nursery. Grandmamma would come and see her as soon as she could, she added, for her comfort. But the child could not be comforted. It seemed as if she would sob her little heart out at the thoughts of her brother being hurt and ill, and she not allowed to go near him. All the misery of helplessness, and inaction, and suspense was to be hers as well as Mrs. Singleton's.

And so the lovely summer's afternoon wore on. The sun was still shining as brightly, the birds still singing as gaily, the bees still humming as busily, as before. Without, all seemed going on exactly the same, as if unconscious that anything sad had happened or could happen. But within, how changed ! A darkened

room, an anxious watcher, a little sorrowful heart almost ready to break, people moving about with hushed footsteps, a little life trembling in the balance. This is what the birds and the bees would have seen could they have looked in.





CHAPTER XII.

FEARS AND FOREBODINGS.

Life Spared—A Patient Sufferer—Courcy is told all—A Dreadful Fear—Lord St. Osyth tells him of a Better Fight—A True Comforter—Patience and another Victory.



THE first few days of agonising suspense were over, and Courcy had lived through them. All fears of immediate danger were relieved. The little life was to be spared to his friends —that much seemed

granted to their prayers; but what life would henceforth mean for the boy, how changed it might be in every respect, remained to be seen.

The nature of the fall had been such as to cause serious injuries; and whether he could ever recover from

them, ever again be able to run, and jump, and bound along in the joyousness of health and spirits as he had done, was a doubtful question, and a subject on which the doctor was afraid for the present to bid them hope. "Though, at the same time, there is no saying," he added, "what his youth and a good constitution, joined to his bright buoyant disposition, may not pull him through."

So they had the terrible fear before them that their active, merry, mischievous Courcy might be a helpless little invalid, obliged to lay prostrate on his back for the rest of his life.

But he did not know that; and he did his best to get well, poor little man! taking his bitter medicines cheerfully and obediently, without resistance or fuss; though the frightful grimaces into which his little face twisted itself afterwards showed how unpleasant the potion had been. But he went through with it all unflinchingly.

He endeavoured to be patient, too, and bear the pain like a man, and not let granny see how bad it was. So he tried to make light of it all, as he had been accustomed to do of lesser hurts. But bravely as he might force back every moan and check every inclination to murmur, he could not help his little pallid face, pinched with pain, from telling its own tale of suffering. The great black circles under the eyes, which often, unconsciously to himself, wore such a piteous look in them; the colourless complexion, showing all the

blue veins, and fair and white as any girl's, instead of brown and sunburnt as it had been—all told their own story.

Still, he tried to make the best of it; and even when the pain was very bad, if he fancied he saw a sad look on his grandmamma's face, he would endeavour to chase it away by forcing his pale lips into a smile, and saying—

"It'll be better soon, granny dear. Don't you mind. It isn't as bad as you think, I daresay; and I must learn to bear things, you know, if I'm to be a soldier."

He little thought how the words that he meant to be so encouraging cut her to the heart till she could scarcely keep back her tears, and longed to be able to go away and weep in private. For it needed all her self-control to see the patient little fellow trying to bear so bravely a cross that pressed more heavily upon him than it would upon some, and to *know* that he was still clinging to what had been the desire and ambition of his life, whilst they felt that, humanly speaking, that hope had been dashed to the earth for ever. It was as much as Mrs. Singleton's loving heart could bear.

They tried to hide their terrible fear from him, but he was too quick and sharp-witted not to find it out at length for himself. A suspicion of the truth dawned upon him, and he immediately put the plain question to his grandmamma. She was taken quite at unawares, and

would have given worlds that the question had never been asked.

But she would not tell the child an untruth. She tried to soften it down—to hold out every possible hope—but she could bring herself absolutely to deceive him, and to deny that there was a doubt of his recovery. She saw the look, little short of agony, that crept over the expressive face as, seizing the fact in all its nakedness, divested of the covering of hopes and possibilities in which she had clothed it, he gasped out—

“Shall I never be able to walk again, then, or run, or jump, or hop? Never get on my stilts again, or climb a tree, or go haymaking or fishing? but always have to lie still or be carried about? Oh, granny!” he cried, in exceeding bitterness, as he reached the climax—“*Then I shall never be able to be a soldier!*”

There was a moment’s silence, as, apparently appalled with the misery of it all, he lay back, with his piteous eyes fastened on his grandmother’s face. It was an ominous pause—like that which a child makes when it has hurt itself and holds in its breath for a moment only to break forth in a louder burst of screams. So after that instant of silence, when Courcy seemed struck dumb by the intensity of his feelings, there came a bitter wail of anguish from the depths of the poor little heart.

Mrs. Singleton, for the moment, knew not what to

say, in what words to attempt to comfort him. There was nothing the boy was feeling in this bitter hour that she had not already felt for him, so she knew the pain and misery of it. She would have kept it from him if she could, but she would not do it at the expense of truth, and the way in which he had questioned her had left her no loop-hole except in flat denial of the fears which each day seemed to be gaining ground. But it had, at least, cost her as much as it had the child. It was a moment that seemed like a life-time—so much pain was compressed into it.

She gently stroked the curly locks from off the tear-stained face, which was half buried in the pillow, her heart yearning over him with such longing to comfort him, such unspeakable love, and tenderness, and sympathy, that it could scarcely find utterance.

“ My own little Courcy ! It seems hard, darling ! Oh, I know it well ! And over and over again, since you have been lying here, granny has felt she would gladly change places with her boy, and bear all the pain, and suffering, and weariness instead of him, if only he might go free. She feels as if she could bear it a thousand times over, if only he might know nothing of it. But, darling, granny, though she loves so well, doesn’t always know what is good for her child. His Heavenly Father alone does that ; but *He* cannot possibly make any mistake. And He sees that, in some way we do not understand, this is necessary, either for you, or for us, or for both ; He would not send it if

it wasn't. And He loves you far better than I do, and even *I* long to bear it all for you, so you may think how much *He* is feeling for you. He would take it all away this instant, and make you strong and well again, if He saw right; for He *could* do that. So, dearest, let us try and bear it as He would have us. It is hard for you, and it is hard for me, for granny feels her little boy's troubles as if they were her own—indeed, they *are* her own. But let us see which of us can be the most cheerful over it and keep up the best heart, still hoping that it may not be so bad as it seems. For it may all turn out, after all, to be quite different from what we imagine. It *may* be only for a little while that you will have to lie here like this."

The little fellow, whose life hitherto had been like one bright beam of happiness, could not help being soothed by the tender words, and comforted by the sense of the love, so deep, and strong, and true, which held him, and encircled him, and seemed as strength and rest itself to his little troubled spirit.

At last, exhausted by the storm of feeling which had swept over him, and which was too much for his little frame in its present frail state, his sobs by degrees became fainter and fainter, until at last they died away, and the weary eyes closed in sleep.

The last thing they had looked upon had been Mrs. Singleton's sweet loving face bending over him. On opening, the first thing they rested upon was the grand, noble countenance of the Earl of St. Osyth.

He was sitting looking at him, with a certain mournful tenderness in the eyes that were noting the wasted form and altered appearance of the little invalid. Certainly Courcy did not want for love—love to surround him at every turn, and put its strong arms about him, and soothe and minister to him. And if it could not bring back the bright shining of the noonday sun upon his path, it at least did its best to gather up and bring him many a stray sunbeam.

He would feel the comfort of it presently still more than he did now, for with awakening consciousness came back the remembrance of the trouble he had forgotten in sleep, and as the tears gathered in the wistful eye he sobbed out in broken words—“Perhaps—I am never going—to get well again ! and if I don’t—I can never be—a soldier !”

Lord St. Osyth, bending forward, laid his hand upon the little hot one that was resting on the coverlet.

“ Yes, you may, my man,” he said, quietly.

The rising tears were checked in the surprise of the moment, as the child fixed inquiring eyes on his friend’s face. But the earl’s next words showed his drift.

“ You may fight many a battle and gain many a victory as you lie there, my child—battles better worth fighting than those with human beings, our own flesh and blood, as it were. These are unsatisfactory, my boy, even the very best of them ; but those will win you an everlasting crown of glory.”

Courcy's eyes were fixed meditatively upon the speaker.

"Yes," continued Lord St. Osyth; "every time you check an impatient word or look, every time you chase away a murmuring rebellious thought, and call up a bright smile instead of yielding to a fretful sigh, you will have gained a noble victory, for you will have conquered yourself. God knows, and even we know, how hard it will often be to you, my little fellow," he went on, with something very like a tremble of deep feeling in his voice; "but remember, it is only the bravest soldiers who are sent to the most difficult posts."

A smile came into the little wan face at these words—a passing gleam of brightness, as if the clouds were parting a little.

"This is God's way of training you for the post you are to take in the ranks of His army, that so you may be 'a good soldier of Jesus Christ.' And if you should be raised up again and permitted to fight for your country and your queen, depend upon it you will never fight earthly foes the worse for having already learned to fight against these others. Rather, the strength you will have gained in those struggles and conquests will nerve your arm with a higher courage, for you will not go forth in your own might, but in the strength of the Lord of Hosts, the God of Battles."

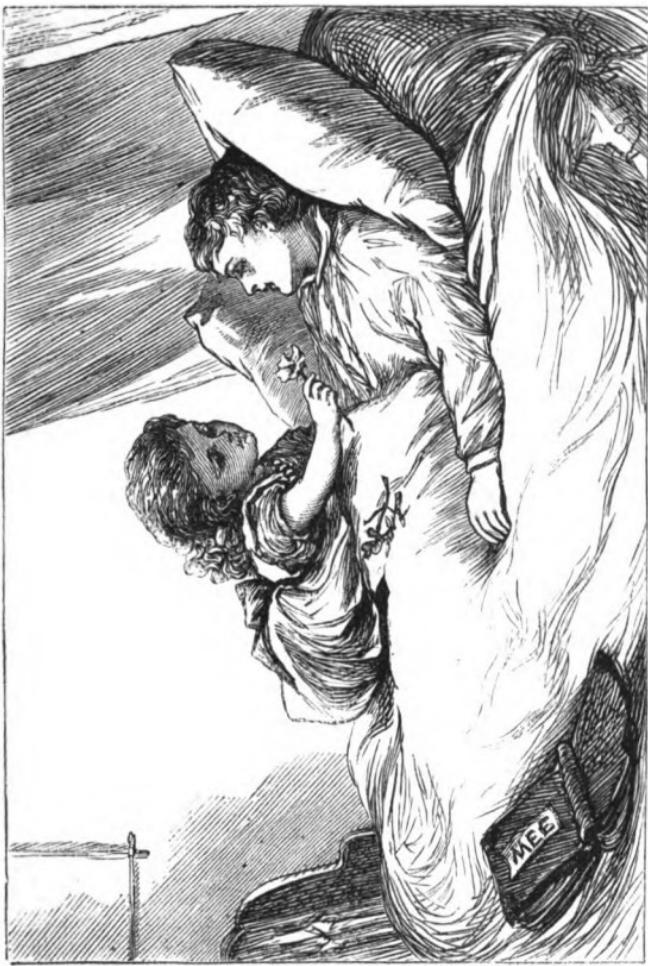
Lord St. Osyth had warmed with his subject, and his quiet tones and words were impressive, the fact that

they came straight from his heart making them the more so; for no one acquainted with the earl could doubt that he too had often known what it was to fight battles such as those of which he spoke. That calm, noble face bore the marks of many a conflict, many a struggle within, before the fire of self-will had been quenched, and the proud heart had learnt to bow in submission, or respond with prompt unquestioning obedience to every behest of its sovereign Lord and Master. He was not speaking of that of which he knew nothing.

And he had touched the right chord in the boy's heart. His own earnestness had struck out an answering spark of enthusiasm in the young ardent nature.

"Tell me more," he said, as the other paused; and when the earl quoted the words, "He that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city," Courcy repeated them after him, as if wishing to remember them.

The little face that had been so sad a while ago now lighted up with a faint sparkle of its old brightness, as his friend, seeing he was not yet tired of the subject, went on to dwell upon the soldier's course that might in any case be his; the unseen warfare he might wage, as he lay there, against impatience, or discontent, or fretful repining thoughts at being thus cut off from almost every thing he most cared for; and how each one of those struggles



"CURLED UP ON THE SIDE OF HIS BED" (p. 180).

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would be noted by his great Captain, and hereafter rewarded with glowing words of praise, before assembled hosts of men and angels.

Then, as Courcy seemed to like listening to him, and for the present anything was better than leaving the child's mind to return to its own sad thoughts, he went on to tell the story, so well known but always so full of interest, of the fight between the stripling David and the giant Goliath ; and spoke of the number of giants still left to fight against ; how there were special ones that beset him, and others that beset Courcy. And the boy's eye kindled at the thought of fighting side by side with his grand old friend, in the same ranks, and under the same Captain.

The talk was not without its effect. Very brave and patient the little fellow tried to be ; though the longer he lay there the harder it seemed. But he succeeded so well that had those about him not known him so thoroughly, they would have fancied that, after all, it was not so great a trial to him as they had feared it would be.

They praised him for his courage and patience ; but they did not know quite all it cost him. He did not care they should, as the earl had reminded him that was to be a secret between him and his great Captain, who knew it all as well or better than he did himself.

But sometimes as he caught sight of Dora out of doors, running after the butterflies, or tossing her ball

on the lawn, his eye would follow her with a wistful gaze, that made his grandmamma's heart ache, as she guessed what his thoughts must be. She could not bear it, but would call the little girl in, to come and sit awhile with her brother, and try to amuse him.

Call her when they might, whether in the midst of a game, or whatever pursuit most interested her, she came readily and joyfully, always so glad to be admitted into his room, so happy if she might only sit curled up on the side of his bed, and look at him or talk to him.

And often the colonel would come in with his jokes, and make all kinds of fun and merriment, until at last Courcy would grow tired out with laughing, and the two would be sent away in disgrace by granny, who would pretend to be very angry with them. Then she would take her seat by the bedside, and tell some of her ever-ready tales made up to suit the occasion, until the tired lids would close, and quiet sleep come to refresh the weary little frame.

And grandpapa and Dora would go off together hand in hand, like two culprits, who had a fellow feeling for one another as having got into the same scrape together. Soon they would be chasing one another round the shrubs or the flower-beds on the lawn, though always out of sight of Courcy's window, lest it should make him long to be with them. Or they would have a ramble round the grounds, apparently in close and confidential intercourse.

For they grew to be very close friends in those days, the colonel and his little granddaughter ; and he would have sorely missed his young companion had he been deprived of her. For now grandmamma was so much in Courcy's room, whilst the child was left without a playmate he had her a good deal with him, trying in his kindheartedness to make up to her for the loss of her brother's society.





CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNUSUAL VISIT.

Courcy has a Dog given him—Luke pays him a Visit—His Nightcap—What Nurse Thought—Hard Training.



whilst it was the most gentle, loving little creature possible.

Courcy's delight knew no bounds. It was almost worth while to be ill, he felt, to have such a present;

NE day Lord St. Osyth had come in bringing a present for Courcy, consisting of the most charming little dog Courcy had ever seen. It was so small as to be quite a plaything, just the size to lie on his bed, or sit perched upon his pillow, or be hugged in his arms,

and the love that immediately sprang up between the little animal and his young master was quite a pretty thing to see. Many a weary hour did Tiny help to beguile, for whenever the little boy chose to turn to him for companionship he was sure to find a grateful response. It was a happy thought of his old friend, for the pleasure it gave Courey was almost unlimited.

He triumphantly exhibited his new possession to every one; and one morning, catching sight of Luke through the window at work upon the lawn outside, he begged that he might be had in to see the dog too.

Mrs. Singleton hesitated, suggesting that she might take Tiny in her arms to the window and there exhibit his perfections to Luke's admiring gaze. But this did not at all fall in with Courey's views. He wanted to show his treasure himself, and witness the other's admiration of him.

"And I haven't seen him once all this time I've been lying here. It's ages since I had a talk with him. Do let him come in, granny, please do."

Mrs. Singleton yielded; for the little fellow was of necessity deprived of so many pleasures that she could not help indulging him in any harmless fancy; so she went to the open window, and beckoned to the man.

Touching his cap respectfully, he approached the window, expecting that his mistress had some order to give him regarding his work. His surprise was great on

finding himself invited to enter the room, and pay a visit to the little invalid.

At first he looked as if he had not heard aright, or required time to grasp such a strange and new idea. Upon Mrs. Singleton repeating the request, he took off his hat and thrust his fingers frantically through his hair, until he had succeeded in making himself look more odd and remarkable than ever. Then, twirling the aforesaid hat in his hands, he shifted from one leg to the other, as if weighing in his mind their respective merits, and pondering upon which it would be the proper thing to stand in that grand room of which he could obtain a partial view from where he was. For honest Luke had never had much experience of the interiors of gentlemen's houses, except perhaps a glimpse of the kitchens or servants' halls ; and for him to set his feet, with their thick hob-nailed boots, down on carpets which seemed as if they were only made to be looked at, not trodden upon, appeared to him the height of presumption. So he remained standing in a state of profound perplexity.

"Come in, Luke," said Mrs. Singleton, repeating her invitation.

"I'm a-thinking, mum, as maybe I'd better *take off* these 'ere boots o' mine. They ain't jest the things for ladies' carpets, and I'm afraid they'll be leaving their marks. I could slip 'em off in a twinkling."

"No, no; never mind your boots," returned Mrs. Singleton, with a smile she could not repress at the odd

figure before her ; a smile, however, which he interpreted to be one of gracious encouragement. " You can't bring much dust in coming straight off the lawn, so it will not matter ; and my little grandson has something he wants to show you."

Thus emboldened, Luke ventured upon a step or two inside the room, treading, as he fondly hoped, lightly and daintily, as became any one in such a fine place, and moreover in the presence of an invalid. But it cannot be said that his movements were graceful. His endeavours to walk thus on tip-toe—the unusual efforts he was making causing all sorts of odd contortions of his body, accompanied by various workings of his face to correspond, until he looked as if he were stepping upon red-hot coals—made him present such a ludicrous spectacle that it was too much for Courcy, and he could not refrain from a little laugh at his friend's expense.

The sound made the visitor turn round. On perceiving the child he started, and stood still with a sort of scared look on his face. Could this little fragile-looking, wasted form be indeed Master Courcy ? He could scarcely have appeared more shocked or startled if he had seen a ghost.

" What is the matter, Luke ? " inquired the little boy, controlling his laughter. " You look as if you didn't know me. But to be sure, you've never seen me in bed before ; and that makes people look different. I wonder, now, how *you* look in bed," he went on,

with a merry twinkle in his eyes. “I should like to take a peep at you some night. Do you wear one of those comical nightcaps, going off to a point at the top?”

Luke appeared to nod his head.

“Do you *really!*” exclaimed Courcy, in delight. “Oh, how funny you must look! I think *I* should like to wear one of them whilst I’m in bed. I dare say I should look very nice in it. Suppose you lend me one of yours to try on, and see how it suits.”

At this idea he went off into a little burst of merriment, something like those that had formerly come so frequently; only that the laugh now was so feeble, and the voice so weak, that it touched Luke to the heart to see the change in the bright, handsome, manly little fellow.

“I could have blubbered over him like a baby, that I could,” he said, when giving his wife an account of the interview.

However, he managed to control his tears somehow; and feeling bound, apparently, to follow the child’s lead, he went off into the odd sort of cackling noise which he called laughter, and which was the most musical sound he could produce in that way. But it always made Courcy inclined to go off into fits, it was so very peculiar, and at the same time so harsh and grating that it was fortunate for Luke’s intimate friends he did not often indulge in such bursts of merriment.

The little boy felt a desire on the present occasion to

put his fingers in his ears ; but he restrained himself, and politely invited his friend to come nearer that he might inspect his " little doggie."

" Isn't he a beauty ? I don't believe you ever saw one half as pretty ! And just look at his eyes ; aren't they lovely ? Wouldn't you like to have such a little darling ? But of course I can't give him away ; only you can come in sometimes and take a look at him. I shan't be able to bring him out to see you, because most likely I shall have to lie here ever so long. So I shan't be able to go walking on my stilts either," and a little half-smothered sigh accompanied the words.

" But that will be a good thing for *you*," he went on, " for I used to bother and hinder you dreadfully, didn't I ? I daresay you get your work done in half the time now."

" I'd put up with a bit of hindering, and wouldn't say nothing about it neither, if I could see you a-going about again, Master Courcy. It don't seem like the same place nohow, never to have you popping about, or hiding and jumping out sudden on one. I ain't got to be a-looking round now a'most every minute to see what piece of mischief you're a-going to be up to next : and it's sort o' dull, it is. I don't like it, that's a fact," said Luke, with emphasis. Then he went on, in aggrieved tones, " I must say doctor might ha' set you going again by this time, I should ha' thought, if he'd been up to anything. What's he 'bout, I should like to know !

How'd he like to be tied to his bed like this for ever *so long!*"

"It isn't his fault," laughed Courcy, amused at the other's outburst. "He would make me well if he could; and so would granny, and everybody. But there's something wrong with my back, you see; and they don't know whether it will *ever* get well. But I dare say it will."

Mrs. Singleton had left the room, thinking Luke would feel more at his ease in her absence; but just at this moment nurse appeared upon the scene, and soon after the visitor took his departure.

Nurse and Courcy were on very friendly terms at present. Her devotion to him had been unbounded throughout his illness, her true kindness of heart and warmth of affection being allowed to show itself now that her sympathies were so drawn out towards him. The hastiness and occasional asperity of manner which she had sometimes displayed in his days of health and strength and never-ending mischief were laid aside now, and her disregard of herself and attention to his slightest want made her most valuable in the sick-room. Mrs. Singleton often said she did not know what she should do without her: she was so trustworthy, and unwearied, and faithful in her service; whilst Courcy's grateful little heart responded warmly to the kindness she lavished upon him, and he made many a virtuous resolution never again to be such a "plague" as he felt conscious he had often been.

"I'm not going to be 'the worst boy you ever saw' any longer," he said to her one day.

True to her system of repression, she merely replied, "I hope not, dear." But it was in warmer tones that she spoke *of* him. "I never knew such a boy—never!" she would exclaim to cook and other sympathising listeners; "it's enough to bring the tears into one's eyes, that it is, to see him so good and patient! I never could have believed he could ever have come to lie there so cheerful and contented. One would have expected he'd be fretting the very life out of him at being chained down to a bed, instead of being on the go the whole of the livelong day as he used to be, playing off first one piece of mischief and then another. But he's more like a little angel than anything else: always saying 'Thank you' as pretty as possible, even if it's horrid, nasty medicine I've just been handing him; and never any murmuring or grumbling. I'd like to see anybody else as would behave like that—and he nothing but a boy! All I can say is, that it's pretty hard work often to keep from crying when one looks at his little pale face and sees him trying so hard to smile, and make believe it's all right."

But though nurse praised him so warmly to others, there were times when all did not go so well with him, when he was tempted to impatience and discontent, and his watchfulness and self-control broke down. But he was always very penitent afterwards, and would plead with tears in his eyes for forgiveness.

"I've been a very naughty boy, and I'm very sorry, granny dear," was generally his simple form of expression.

So it was not always victory with him ; but we often learn much from our defeats, and the brave, steadfast little heart was being trained by both successes and reverses. That which was noble in him was being strengthened and developed—he was learning to fight, he was in training for a soldier.





CHAPTER XIV.

CHRISTMAS TIME.

Recovery at Last—Another Visit to Maynell Park—A Happy Christmas at the Manor—Courcy makes Luke a Present, and nearly Kills him with Kindness—Lord St. Osyth's Sorrow.



THE summer wore slowly away — the summer that was to have been so full of delights to Courcy in the way of fishing and other enjoyments at Maynell.

But it had not been all dark or gloomy, even to the little boy. The trial which—with the help of the loving hearts around him—he had tried to bear cheerfully, had brought

many a rich gift with it, for patient endurance and courage, born of a readiness to meet and face the worst,

are so much nobler than the soft, self-sparing temper that shrinks back from everything painful, that they are no small acquisition, and are well bought, even at the price of suffering. So Courcy would doubtless come one day to give thanks for what at first had seemed so grievous. His grandparents and his kind old friend Lord St. Osyth did so even now, as they saw the blessing he was reaping from it.

Autumn came, bringing bright hopes with it. The London doctor, who came down again to see him, hinted at a cure possible to time and patience; and as the weeks went by, Courcy began to make progress faster than they had even ventured to hope. His happy temperament was greatly in his favour, and had from the first helped him to pull through what might have proved too much for a more desponding or fretful disposition. So he was reaping the fruit of his patience and cheerful obedience in the favourable symptoms that now gave such fair promise of recovery.

Having once made a start, he astonished everybody by his rapid strides towards convalescence; and a very happy time it was when each day came, bringing with it some fresh gift of added strength and renewed powers, until at last the little fellow was on his legs again, and though still needing the greatest care, was able to walk from room to room, a thing they had once feared he would never do again.

It was before the trees had quite shed their leaves, and whilst they still stood in their bright parti-coloured

garments of yellow, orange, or russet-brown of many shades, all hues seemingly blended and mixed in rich confusion, till, when the golden beams of the setting sun fell on them, they flashed back his radiance, and the whole country-side seemed to flame and flush into a kind of magic beauty—just at that time it was that Courcy was permitted to pay his much-longed-for visit to Maynell, the first since his accident and illness.

The earl came to fetch him in his carriage, promising that he should be brought home again before the sun went down, or any chilliness began to be felt in the air. He also undertook to see that he did not sit up too long at a time, as he was still ordered to be kept a good deal in a recumbent posture.

Courcy's spirits were so great, and his happiness so real and unfeigned, that Lord St. Osyth seemed to catch the infection, and by the power of sympathy within him reflected the brightness that beamed on the young face. The *time* went by only too quickly ; but the earl was faithful to his promise, and sent his little visitor home, under Mrs. Rossiter's care, even before Mrs. Singleton had begun to look out for him.

But the visit was soon repeated ; for the earl and Mrs. Rossiter between them took such good care of him, and were so watchful that he should not overturn himself, that Mrs. Singleton felt she could trust him there with the greatest confidence. So he was a constant guest at the castle.

And sometimes Dora came as well, accompanied by

nurse, who was entertained by the housekeeper. Many a happy hour was spent by the children amongst the varied delights of Maynell Castle, which was just as enjoyable in wet weather as in fine, as there was so much to be seen indoors, so many curiosities collected from all parts of the world, such cabinets of natural history to be looked through under the earl's guidance, or when tired of that, such splendid romps or games at hide-and-seek to be had in the long corridor or spacious apartments opening out of it, and now but little used.

By Christmas-time Courcy seemed quite well and strong again, and was able to enter fully into all the many pleasures it brought with it. Great excitement prevailed among the little people, which excitement reached its climax on Christmas Eve, when Lord St' Osyth came as a guest to the manor ; and there was a beautiful Christmas-tree laden with presents for Courcy and Dora, as well as some of their own bestowal for grandmamma and grandpapa, the earl, and Nurse Cardle. Moreover, hanging on high, looking like a flaming banner, was a special gift from Courcy to Luke.

It consisted of an enormous handkerchief for the neck, which had greatly taken Courcy's fancy at a shop in Horton, and which he had bought with his own pocket-money for his friend. Many brilliant hues were intermixed in it ; but scarlet, Courcy's favourite colour —the soldier's colour as he called it—predominated. After the tree had been dismantled of its pretty things, the little boy, possessing himself of his magnificent gift,



"INSISTED UPON MUFFLING HIS FRIEND IN IT" (p. 197).

rushed off with it to the servants' hall, where festivities, to which Luke and his wife had been invited, were going forward.

The recipient of the unexpected present looked fully as much surprised as the little boy could have wished ; but unfortunately for the former, the latter would not be satisfied without seeing it put on, and insisted upon muffling his friend in it, nearly throttling him in the process by his eagerness.

"There, now ! doesn't he look nice, Mrs. Luke ? " he cried, stepping back a few paces to admire the result. "It just matches the colour of his face, and it will keep him so beautifully warm. Now you won't take it off, will you, Luke, for it makes you look splendid ? "

Poor Luke could only murmur something inaudible, his sufferings being great at that moment from the heat into which he had been thrown by this sudden muffling up, joined to the attack of bashfulness which seized him at being thus singled out and made to play so prominent a part in the midst of a room full of company, in which simple-minded Luke felt himself quite out of his element. It was little wonder that his face, as Courcy had remarked, was of the same colour as that of the brilliantly-dyed handkerchief itself.

But though Christmas passed so happily with the children, and Lord St. Osyth, with his usual unselfish readiness to participate in others' joys, threw himself into their amusements and promoted them in every way, there yet was perceptible on his countenance when at

rest a deepening shade of sadness—a sadness, however, which he tried to banish, and fancied he effectually concealed; for his life-sorrow was not one about which he could speak to others; it was a burden to be borne alone as far as human help went—a cross to be taken up and patiently carried, but not the less on that account felt to be a cross.

Both Colonel and Mrs. Singleton noticed that a heavier cloud than usual seemed to be resting upon him, and they felt that it was little wonder; this joyous season of family gatherings and reunions must be so especially painful to the solitary father whose tender nature made him so peculiarly sensitive to the wounds inflicted by ingratitude and desertion. His friends at Brerethorpe felt inclined to utter hard things against the absent prodigal, who was causing such sorrow to so loving a heart; but they forbore to speak them even to one another, remembering that though so bitter a disappointment to the father, he was yet as much as ever his son, and evidently still held the only son's place in the faithful heart that was ready even now to receive and welcome him back at any moment.

But cautious as they both were, other people were not so guarded, and from one and another Courcy, with his quick, sharp ears, gathered a pretty clear idea of the state of things. Reports had long come from town of the wild doings of the young lord—of courses worse than merely excessive pleasure-seeking; but now there were whispers of something very like disgrace beginning

to attach itself to his name, which, moreover, was mentioned in connection with Jews and money-lenders, in a way little creditable. The kind-hearted colonel and his wife longed to spare their old friend, and keep these things from coming to his ears ; but that was impossible. He knew already far more than they did ; had learnt with anguish that had wrung many a groan from him of the depths to which his boy had sunk, and which seemed, to his honourable, upright nature, humiliation enough to bow down his head to the very earth.

No wonder the earl's heart was heavy, and his thoughts sad and anxious, as he rode home to the castle on Christmas Eve, beneath the stars which shone out of the clear frosty sky upon a world full that night of mingled joy and sorrow. They looked down upon many a joyful meeting, many a happy family circle, and also on many a lonely solitary heart, knowing its own bitterness, and either wrestling with its pain, in half indignant rebellion, or meekly taking it to be shared by the Man of Sorrows, whose sympathy could alone help and strengthen them.

It was the latter course Lord St. Osyth took, as he wended his way, slowly and meditatively, towards Maynell Castle, which, as he approached, stood out, a picturesque-looking old pile, silvered by the moonbeams, which shed a sort of magic beauty over it, throwing some portions into deep shadow, and causing others to stand out in strong relief. An artist's eye would have been charmed with the scene, and he would have paused

in delight to take in every detail—the dark ivy-clad towers, with their battlemented crests showing so distinctly against the clear background of star-spangled sky ; the beautiful Gothic windows of the chapel, with their delicate tracery ; the magnificent though sombre-looking cedars that stood round about like sentinels, and cast dark, fanciful shadows upon the moonlit sward.

All was silence as the earl crossed the great hall with a weary step, and entering the library, threw himself down on a seat beside his solitary hearth. The room looked dreary and very empty, after the life and warmth of the drawing-room at Brerethorpe, with its happy groups and little circle of loving hearts. He covered his face with his hands for a moment, and when he withdrew them he did not take up his book or paper according to custom, but left them beside him, unopened, as he sat on in deep thought and painful musing. Generally he tried to prevent himself from falling into a reverie such as this, and, to distract his mind, he would often read on till late into the night ; but this evening he felt listless and languid, and less capable than usual of any mental effort.

So he sat on, occupied with his mournful retrospect and sad forebodings ; more conscious than ever of an aching sense of loneliness and desertion. To-morrow would be the fifth Christmas Day that his son had sper away from home.



CHAPTER XV.

AT HOME AGAIN AT LAST.

Lord St. Osyth is taken Ill—Mrs. Rossiter sends for Lord Maynell—Courcy Pays his Friend a Visit, and does him Good—An Arrival at Maynell Park—A Colloquy—Courcy tells Lord Maynell many things—Softened at Last.



JANUARY had come, and found Lord St. Osyth confined to his room. It was no sudden alarming attack, no painful seizure or burning fever, but an utter prostration of strength, which had reduced him to so low an ebb that the medical men began to

doubt whether he would ever rally from it. Day by day came and went, taking away with it some little portion of his slender stock of vital power, until he was so weak that he could scarcely lift his head from the pillow, but was almost as helpless as a child. Still he

retained perfect consciousness, and with that his capacity for suffering.

The doctors said that some mental strain or worry was the root of it all, and until that was removed their skill could avail little ; whilst Mrs. Singleton expressed her conviction to her husband that the earl was dying of a broken heart.

Either she or the colonel came every day to inquire for him, and immediately the doctors had given that hint, she and Mrs. Rossiter consulted together what could be done, finally agreeing that the housekeeper should write off at once to Lord Maynell, telling him of his father's critical state, and urging him to come at once. Mrs. Rossiter felt strongly on the subject, and took the opportunity—the first that had ever come in her way—of bringing before him the grief his continued absence and estrangement had been to his father, and expressing her own opinion that the sight of him was the only thing that could do the earl real good. “Though I doubt whether your lordship may not be too late even now,” she added. Then she sent off the letter, and waited in almost breathless expectation for an answer of some sort. She earnestly hoped it might be the young lord himself in person ; but she felt it was doubtful. She had directed the letter to his club, but she did not even know whether he were now in London or abroad, and with so much uncertainty about it, she carefully kept from the earl all knowledge of what she had done, as the suspense and the disappointment that

might perhaps follow would be altogether too much for him.

Courcy, who loved his kind old friend with all the warmth of his true young heart, had been full of grief on hearing of his illness, and had pleaded so hard that he might be allowed to see him, that Mrs. Rossiter, whose faithful services entitled her to the chief place in attendance on her master in his sickness (even if it had not been his expressed wish that she should wait on him) ventured to tell him of the little boy's earnest longing to be admitted to his room, if only just for five minutes.

"I will be *so* good; I will be just as still as a mouse, if you will only let me come in," he had said, and she had promised to consider his request.

The earl looked pleased on hearing of the child's wish. "Let him come in by all means, Mrs. Rossiter. Dear little fellow! I should never have thought such a lively boy as he is would have been so anxious for admittance into an old man's sick room. But his bright face will be like a little sunbeam. Bring him up to-morrow, Mrs. Rossiter, if he comes."

The morrow brought Courcy, who generally begged to accompany his grandparents on their errand of inquiry. His face beamed with pleasure when Mrs. Rossiter, hearing carriage wheels, came out to the door, and gave him the earl's message. Mrs. Singleton agreed to drive on further, and pick him up again on her return, so he eagerly descended from the carriage.

He seemed duly impressed with the gravity of the occasion, as he walked upstairs behind his conductress with a face so serious that he looked like a little judge. Arrived at the door, a temporary fit of shyness seemed to seize him, but it was too late to go back now, for Mrs. Rossiter took him by the hand and led him in.

Then he heard the earl's feeble voice bidding him to come nearer, whilst a thin weak hand was held out to him. The smile on the face was as kind as ever, and encouraged by it, Courcy had soon scrambled on to the foot of the bed, and taken up a position there in a cross-legged attitude, whilst he told out his sorrow at his friend's illness in simple boyish terms. It was all said in subdued tones, whilst his manner was as gentle and quiet as befitted a sick-room.

When Mrs. Rossiter, after a few minutes, approached to say she thought it was time now for him to come away, as his lordship could not bear very much, he made no resistance, but prepared to obey cheerfully, only pleading with a wistful look that he might be allowed to come again.

The earl readily assented, declaring that his visit had done him good. His company was evidently a solace and a distraction to the invalid, and so the visit was repeated daily, for a longer or a shorter period, as the latter could bear it.

He would sit and chatter away about his little pursuits, or bits of home news, contented only to be with his old friend, and making no demands upon him in any



“HE WOULD SIT AND CHATTER AWAY” (p. 204).

way. So, if disinclined to say much himself, Lord St. Osyth could leave all the conversation to the little boy, and simply lie and listen to his artless flow of talk, as he told anecdotes of Tiny's cleverness, or delivered messages from Dora, or related some quaint conversation between himself and Luke, which was enough to provoke a smile.

So it sometimes happened that he was left at the castle for the greater part of the afternoon ; for the earl, if too tired to bear even his little voice, liked to have him about him, and Courcy would make himself perfectly happy for an hour at a time, lying on the hearth-rug, or curled up on the broad window seat, reading a story-book, and, as he expressed it, "as quiet as a mouse." He never seemed tired of being there, though his romps at home were just as noisy as of old, and his love of fun still as far from being quenched.

But at the faintest call from the earl he would joyfully spring to his side, and was so full of pride and delight if permitted to hand him anything, or make himself useful in any way, that it would often bring a loving smile into the older face. The little fellow's devotion was very pleasant to him, for it was genuine affection alone that could have taught the eager restless spirit thus to control all superfluous energy, and show such tender, thoughtful love.

The day after that on which Mrs. Rossiter had written her letter to Lord Maynell, Courcy was left thus for a couple of hours or so, whilst Colonel Singleton, who

had brought him, drove on to a place some miles distant, at which he had to transact a little business.

Mrs. Rossiter met him in the hall, saying the earl was asleep at that moment, and therefore he had better wait a bit in the library, and she would be sure to come and call him as soon as his lordship could see him. She left him surrounded by story-books and pictures, declaring, in reply to a fear she expressed to that effect, "I shan't be dull a bit. I've got a jolly book here, and Neptune and I will keep each other company till it's time for me to come upstairs."

Neptune was the earl's favourite retriever, a fine, handsome creature, gentle and affectionate, and quite disposed to respond to Courcy's overtures of friendship.

The little boy, lying full length on the hearth-rug, with his arm round his dumb friend, and his eyes intently fixed upon the story-book he was devouring, was soon too much engrossed to take note of any sounds without, and therefore he was quite taken by surprise when the door was suddenly thrown open, and a young man entered with the air of one at home.

"I will wait here, then, Peters," he was saying to the old butler, who was behind him. "My father, of course, must not be disturbed, as you say he is asleep. When Mrs. Rossiter comes down from his room it will be time enough to let her know of my arrival. No, I won't take anything; I want nothing more."

The servant, thus dismissed, closed the door, whilst the young man advanced into the room.

Courcy sprang to his feet, and the two stood confronting one another. The stranger was evidently astonished at finding a little boy in possession of the library, and he cast a silent questioning glance at him. The latter returned the gaze with one equally scrutinising. There was something in the face of the handsome young fellow before him which reminded him of the earl, and though he had not heard a word of the summons which had been sent to Lord Maynell, he at once jumped to the conclusion that this must be he.

With the abruptness that sometimes characterised him, he exclaimed eagerly, "Are you Lord St. Osyth's little boy?" Then, conscious that he had expressed himself in a way that was scarcely applicable to the tall, well-built young man before him, he added, correcting himself, "I mean—you are Lord Maynell, aren't you? for you are something like that picture in the dining-room, and Lord St. Osyth said that was his little boy. Though you aren't very little now, certainly," he concluded, with a laugh.

"I shouldn't have thought you could have traced much resemblance between me and that picture; I am supposed to have altered considerably since that time," said the young man, with a certain bitterness in his tones. "But you are right in imagining that I am the original of it. I was about your size when it was taken; but you didn't expect I should always remain at that height, did you?"

"No, I suppose not; I hadn't thought about it. But oh, I *am* glad you are come!"

"Indeed! May I ask why? For I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"Because Lord St. Osyth will be so happy now; he has wanted you so badly all this time. But now he's very ill," added the child, sadly. "Oh, I do wish you had come before; and then, perhaps, he wouldn't have got ill."

A shade of something that looked like either pain or annoyance crossed the young man's face, as he threw himself into an easy chair beside the fire, and glancing across at Courcy, said—

"You seem to have a very intimate acquaintance with all the family concerns. May I ask who it is I have the pleasure of speaking to?"

"Do you mean what is my name?" returned the boy, putting the question into plain terms, and appearing not to notice the slightly sarcastic tone. "I'm called Courcy Singleton."

"Singleton!" echoed the other, as if he remembered the name. "A Singleton of Brerethorpe?"

"Yes, grandpapa lives at the Manor; and so do I and Dora now papa is gone away to India."

"And who is entertaining you here, as my father is ill up-stairs?"

"I'm just waiting till he wakes, and then I'm going up to see him for a few minutes; though I expect he'll want to see you instead now," added



"THE YOUNG MAN ADVANCED INTO THE ROOM" (*p. 203*).

Courcy, with a touch of disappointment in his voice.

The young man did not reply. He appeared to have gone off into a brown study, for he was staring hard into the fire, seemingly forgetful of the child's presence. So the latter curled himself up on the hearth-rug, and found occupation for the next few minutes in contemplating the countenance of his companion.

They remained thus without speaking, until Courcy broke the pause by saying, meditatively, with his dark eyes fixed gravely upon the handsome, and, in his eyes, pleasant, good-tempered face opposite him—

"I'm sure you don't *look* so bad ! I thought you'd have been much worse."

It was doubtful whether he had meant to utter his thoughts aloud; but, at all events, Lord Maynell caught the words.

Turning with a look half amused, half vexed, he rejoined, "I'm very glad, I'm sure, to find you are thus far agreeably disappointed in me, and your candour is delightful. May I ask what you had expected ? Had you been led to imagine me a monster of iniquity, with a sort of villainous look ?" he added, in hard, bitter tones, accompanied by an unpleasant laugh.

"No," replied Courcy, gravely and literally, too much in earnest to joke. "But you don't *look* as if you would do it," he argued, as if puzzling out some difficult question in his mind.

"As if I would do what ?" queried the other.

"Break your father's heart, like people say you are doing," replied the boy, speaking plainly, as was his wont.

"So that is what they say, is it? Much obliged to them, I'm sure!" exclaimed the young man with a harsh laugh, which any keen observer would have perceived was put on to cover those deeper feelings which he did not choose to show. And a slight twitching of the mouth would have confirmed them in this impression.

But to Courcy's inexperience that laugh sounded sadly out of place and heartless. Inexpressibly shocked he exclaimed, indignantly, quite carried away by his feelings: "Don't you *care* whether you break his heart or not? Then I think you are very wicked, and I don't like you a bit. You can't be nice, or you'd be sorry to make him so unhappy, and wouldn't laugh at it. You can't love him at all," he added, mournfully; "and I love him so dearly."

The little fellow's voice almost trembled with the force of his feelings, and he turned away to hide his face on Neptune's shaggy back, under pretence of embracing him. The animal, perceiving that something was amiss, looked with inquiring eyes from one to the other, as if asking what it all meant; and, moreover showing himself ready to espouse Courcy's cause should the stranger prove obnoxious in any way. For Neptune, having become an inmate of the castle since Lord Maynell's last visit, could not be supposed to know

who he was, and consequently looked upon him as an intruder.

"I must say, my fine fellow, you don't mince your words," rejoined the other. "You seem to have quite a genius for telling home truths—or what you consider such—with a straightforwardness that has something sublime about it. Who has put you up to this line of action? Is it my father who has been telling you of my misdeeds?"

"*No!*" returned Courcy, emphatically. "You know it couldn't be. He never says a word against you. He's too fond of you. But I've heard people saying all sorts of things; and I know you make him unhappy, because he always looks so sad when I speak about you. I used to ask questions about you, but I never do now, because I've found out it makes him sorry to think about you."

Lord Maynell turned his face away and remained silent. There was another long pause. The shadows were deepening in the room as the short winter's afternoon was beginning to close in; but the bright glow of fire-light lit up the two faces, and reflected itself in the two pairs of eyes that were gazing into it. Both wore softened looks; the expression of the young man's strangely belying the harshness of his laugh and the seeming indifference of his words.

Courcy's indignation seemed to evaporate by degrees. After a few minutes, he crept closer to the other. Laying his little hand lightly on his, he began—

"Won't you try and make him happy now? Won't you tell him you are sorry?" he pleaded, his little heart full of earnest longing that his kind old friend should be comforted.

"Would it be any use?" murmured the young man, musingly, as if speaking to himself. He had laid aside his mocking tone, as though touched by the little fellow's earnestness. "Saying I'm sorry can't make up for the past."

"I don't know about that," rejoined Courcy, reflectively. "But whenever I've been naughty, if I go and tell granny I'm sorry, she forgives me directly. Only she says I must show I'm really sorry by not doing the same thing again."

"But perhaps every one mightn't be as ready to forgive as your grandmamma."

"Lord St. Osyth is," returned the little boy, promptly.

"How do you know? Have you ever done anything to vex him?"

In reply, Courcy told about his first visit to the castle, and the incident of the broken bust, relating all Mrs. Rossiter had said about it, and how grieved the earl had looked for a minute, and yet how readily he had forgiven him.

He had only just finished when their conversation was interrupted by Mrs. Rossiter herself, who, having just heard of Lord Maynell's arrival, came down to say that as the earl seemed particularly languid and drowsy

just now, she thought it best not to arouse him for the present by telling him of his son's arrival.

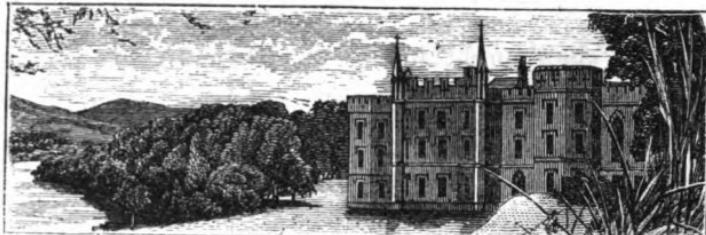
"I think we had better wait till the doctor comes for his second visit, and ask his opinion. I'm so afraid whether the excitement might be too much for him; and yet if there's anything can do him good it's the sight of your lordship. If that doesn't put new life into him nothing else can."

"Just as you think best, Mrs. Rossiter," said the young man, wearily, throwing himself back in his chair with the air of one heavy at heart. "I will await the doctor's verdict."

He seemed disinclined for conversation, and merely asked a few questions respecting his father—questions to which Mrs. Rossiter gave strictly truthful answers, not softening down her own serious apprehensions, but rather putting everything in its gloomiest light, as if she had determined not to spare him.

Courcy, during the conversation, had withdrawn himself out of ear-shot, going off with Neptune to the large window at the end of the long room; and just at this juncture Colonel Singleton arrived to pick him up and take him home.





CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

A Painful Retrospect—The Meeting between Father and Son—Reconciliation—Confession—Lord Maynell turns over a New Leaf—Courcy has a Pony—All Well at Last.



LORD MAYNELL was thus left alone with his own thoughts. Painful ones they seemed to be, judging by a sound, something like a smothered groan, which escaped him from time to time as he sat on in the gathering gloom beside the slowly dying

fire, which he forgot to replenish. He had said he would ring for lights when he wished for them, and the servant, dismissed thus summarily, had felt that the young master desired to be left alone, and was in no mood to be intruded upon. It seemed a dismal home-

coming, though he could not but own he merited nothing better.

Left thus to himself in the stillness and silence of the spacious house—in which every one was moving noiselessly, for fear of disturbing its master—he had nothing to interrupt his gloomy reverie. Back over past years went his thoughts, as he pictured former homecomings from school or from college, when he had been received in that very room with such warm greetings—at first by both father and mother, afterwards by the father alone, who had seemed to strive, by showing a double amount of love, to make up for the absent mother. How joyously he had been accustomed to look forward to those times ; how he had counted the days to them ; how swiftly the weeks had fled ; and how soon the parting had come round again !

Then he saw himself launched upon the world and surrounded by gay companions, who first captivated him, and then acquired such hold upon him that he did not even try to break loose from them, until, by degrees, the home life came to seem tame, and he had gone on from bad to worse. But, not having lost *all* sense of shame, he had felt—in those moments when disgust at his present courses swept over him—that he could never again bear to face his pure upright-minded father, who must look upon him as a disgrace to their name. He had had many a wretched moment, when he had longed to break through the trammels surrounding him, seek a reconciliation, and begin a new and better life. But

his chains held him too fast, he had not strength of will enough to break through them. So he had gone on, despising himself all the time, but still pursuing the same courses.

It was in one of his better moments that the news of his father's illness reached him. Back, like the returning tide, there swept over him the remembrance of the tender love which he had cast from him in his wilfulness, and which he was now, perhaps, about to lose for ever. How precious and priceless it seemed at that moment! All the affection of boyish warm-hearted days seemed to return, only intensified in its nature; and in feverish impatience he had hurried down to Maynell, hoping, and yet almost fearing to hope, that he might find his father yet alive, and win from him a word of forgiveness.

Then came Courcy's home truths, which had cut him to the heart, though he had not chosen to reveal his feelings. They had shown him in a clear light there was no mistaking what these courses of his had been to his father—the shame, the grief they had inflicted on him. Hitherto no one had spoken to him thus plainly, no one had had the courage or the opportunity to deal thus faithfully with him; and perhaps, had they attempted it, his anger would only have been aroused by it. But the candour and simplicity of the child had disarmed him.

The meeting between Lord St. Osyth and his son must be passed over in silence. Some things are too deep and sacred to bear description. Suffice it to say,

that when Courcy, the next day, was admitted to his old friend's room for a few minutes, he found his new acquaintance sitting in an easy-chair by his father's bedside, with a look on his face very different from that it had worn on the previous afternoon. As to the earl's countenance, it was beaming with quiet happiness, whilst he declared himself feeling better already, only a little tired and glad to rest.

From that day he began steadily to improve, to Courcy's great delight, and the little fellow's joyous spirits became almost infectious. A friendship soon sprang up between him and Dick Maynell, as the latter said he was to call him; and the two seemed very well pleased with each other's society—the bright, high-spirited boy, with his freshness and innocence, proving a refreshing companion to the young man, jaded and sick at heart of the tone and ways of the set amongst which he had been living for so long.

And then, for an older friend, he had Colonel Singleton, whose manliness and frankness charmed him, whilst his kindness of heart and soundness of judgment enabled him to be a real help to the young man in these his first efforts to walk in a new path.

It had been hard work to confess all the past, and make a clear statement of his present involvements; but that done, a tremendous load seemed to have been lifted from Richard Maynell's mind; and when certain retrenchments, which his father represented as necessary, had been agreed upon, he felt he had at least taken one

step in the right direction. He had quite made up his mind now to remain at home, and throw himself into the duties and interests of his position ; and the decision gave such joy to his father, that it filled him with self-reproach to think of the years he had spent away from him.

He was a frequent visitor at Brerethorpe, where he soon came to be looked upon as almost one of the family circle. He had become quite a hero in Courcy's eyes, and in Dora's as well ; whilst even nurse no longer said hard things of him, finding that Mrs. Rossiter had completely taken him into favour again. But Mrs. Singleton was one of his chief attractions to the manor, for her genuine kindness and sympathy had soon won his confidence, and made him feel almost as if he had found a second mother.

Courcy was thrown into an ecstasy of delight about this time by the present from his grandpapa of a beautiful little pony. As soon as he came to feel at home upon it, he was permitted sometimes to join the two gentlemen in their rides, and his sense of grandeur and importance on those occasions was almost past description.

But he did not want to have all the pleasure to himself.

“Granny,” he said, one day, on returning from a ride, with his cheeks glowing and his dark eyes sparkling from his enjoyment of the exhilarating exercise, “I’m always going to try and keep out of mischief now that

grandpapa has given me the pony, because it makes me feel *bigger* somehow ; and I suppose it's only *little* boys who get into mischief. But there's something else I want to say. Do you think if I were to save up all my pocket-money for ever so long, and never spend a penny of it, I could get enough to buy Dora a pony ? ”

“ *A pony !* ” exclaimed Mrs. Singleton, in astonishment.

“ Yes, granny ; because it would be so nice if she had one too. It must be so hard for her, I should think, to see me go off, and be left behind herself ; but if she had a pony too, we could go out together, and when I get bigger I could take care of her. Oh, it would be so jolly ! But you haven’t told me, granny, if you think I could ever save up enough.”

Mrs. Singleton had looked somewhat aghast at the picture the boy had drawn of his little sister going out on her pony intrusted to his care. She felt she should certainly put off *that* day as long as possible. But not the less did she admire the generous spirit shown by her little grandson.

“ My darling, grandpapa will be quite willing to give Dora a pony as soon as she is old enough to ride it, provided she wishes for it ; but she is rather a timid little woman, and I think would prefer putting off the honour to some future day.”

Courcy looked disappointed.

“ Well, I shall save up my money for her all the same, and buy her something to play with whilst I’m

out riding. But I can't imagine how anybody can help wishing for a pony if they haven't got one. I suppose girls are different, though," he added, with a touch of boyish contempt. "I'm glad I'm not a girl. But I don't want Dora, after all, to be different to what she is. So if she likes a doll better than a pony, I'll buy her a doll."

"That will please her best, I am quite sure," said Mrs. Singleton, highly approving of his decision.

In the midst of these new pleasures and friendships, Courcy did not swerve in the least in his loyal affection to his old friend Lord St. Osyth. It was still as great an enjoyment to be with him as ever; and when summer came they had more than one day's fishing together, as well as many a pleasant ramble in Maynell Wood as the autumn drew on and the blackberries and nuts began to ripen.

And into the earl's face had crept a look of deep, quiet, thankful happiness, which never shone out so brightly as when, arm-in-arm with his son, he paced the terrace in the cool of the summer evening, or drew up his chair in winter beside the hearth that used to be so lonely, but on the opposite side of which a manly form and a handsome young face—less irresolute and more determined than of old—might generally be seen.

He had waited long and patiently for this day—so long that hope at one time had well-nigh fled—but it had come at last, and very sweet it was.

